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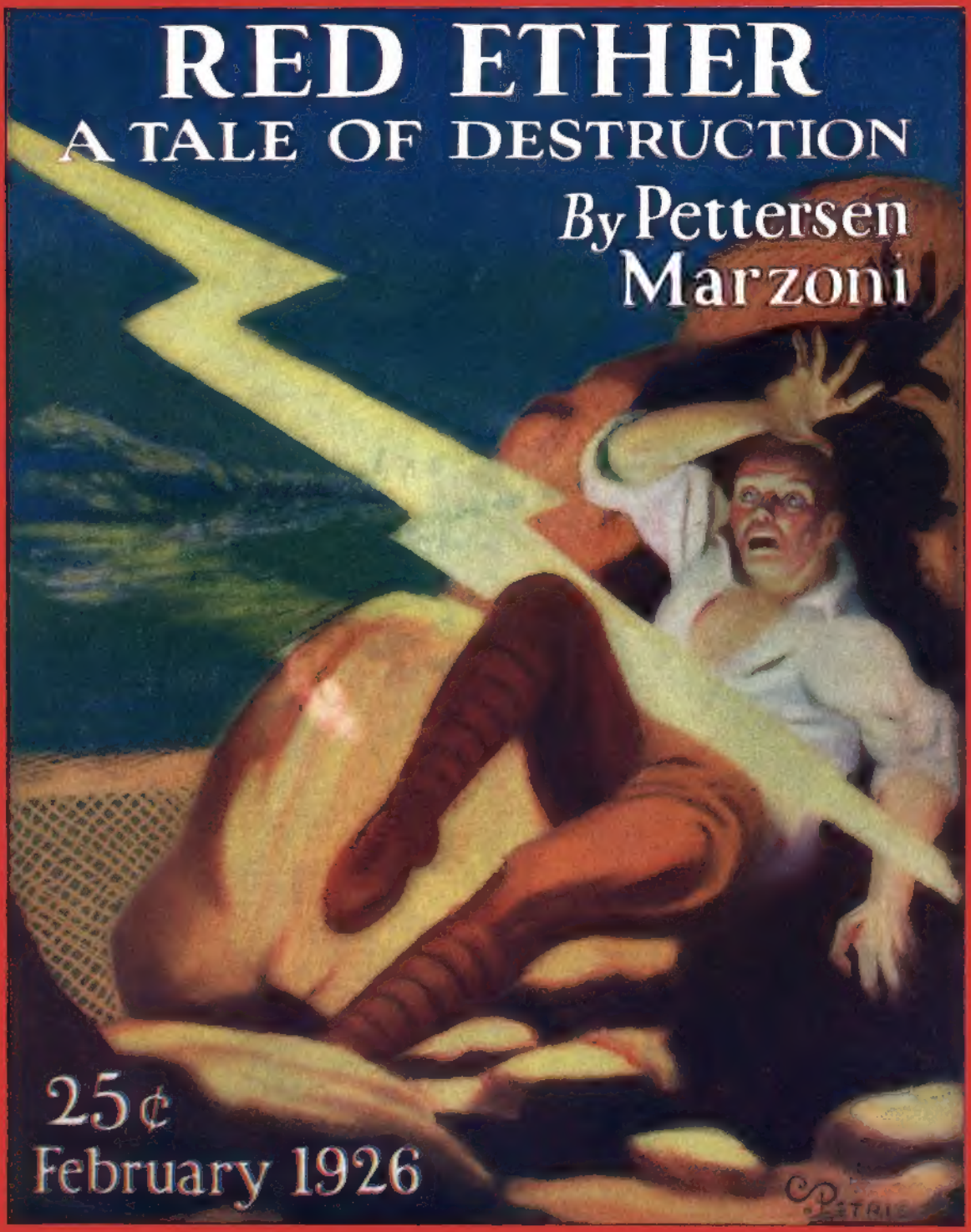

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FEBRUARY, 1926

WEIRD TALES

Printed in U.S.A.

Vol. VII, No. 2—25c

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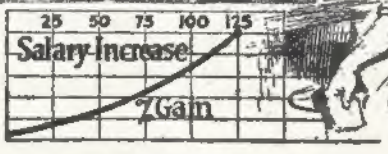

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Weird Tales

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VOLUME VII NUMBER 2

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"Washington became an armed camp in face of the threat to destroy the Capitol, the Congress, and the President by these strange new rays."

CRICKETS were chirping in the lush grass outside the tent, and a mocking bird was practising calls from the topmost limb of a black walnut. It was too mild an orchestration for Douglas Blandon, who was smoking a pipe to the strains of a modern jazz orchestra. He had brought an extra fifty pounds of luggage to the wilds of Tennessee, containing the most modern radio set he could find, and now he was in touch with his world, though miles away.

The saxophone's laugh and the muted blare of the trombone were suddenly wiped out in a cacophony that almost split his ears. Blandon tore the receivers from his head and rubbed his ears in a vain effort to relieve the aching drums. Even with the head set on the table beside him the harsh din was plainly audible, rising, not in the hissing buzz of static, but with a more clangorous note, rounded to a jangle of sound that hurt.

"Some static!" Blandon commented. "Enough to produce more juice than Muscle Shoals. If they knew there was such a thing as a power line in this part of the world I would think I was hooked in on one." He made no attempt to pick up the receivers again, but he twisted the tuning dial back and forth idly. There was no diminution of the noise which kept the diaphragms of his set clacking with the strength of the impulse.

The clangor ceased as suddenly as it began. The set lay silent on the table. Blandon waited a minute or two and then gingerly replaced the receivers to his ears. He tuned back to his concert, and as he settled down to enjoy it again he noted casually that it was ten minutes after 8 o'clock. The concert ended, and a strident-voiced announcer threatened a talk on economic conditions. Blandon found some more music. So he passed an hour eavesdropping from New York to St. Louis, from Chicago to Birmingham.

As suddenly as before his ears were

assailed with the tumult that had threatened his hearing an hour before. Even more hurriedly than at 8 o'clock he removed the receivers and listened to the multisonous din coming in through the air. For minutes it kept up and just before it ceased he caught a flow of rhythm in the clatter, a semi-cadence in the waves of sound that were breaking through his instrument into the narrow confines of his tent. Before he could be certain, the stridor ceased.

"More than static," Blandon said to himself wonderingly. "Must be some new spark that can't be tuned out, possibly somebody trying a new radiation. Government will have to step on that, especially during broadcasting hours; it gums up a man's evening." A casual glance at his clock showed that it was five minutes past 9.

After a wait to make sure that the air was clear of the deafening noise, Blandon went listening again for the voice of the world. He caught it in an announcement from New York.

"The recent disturbances in the air have been reported from all over the country. It is not yet possible to determine the cause. Anyone accomplishing this is requested to communicate immediately with NAA, Naval Radio Station, Arlington."

So he wasn't the only one in on this thing. The government was getting interested. Somebody was going to be stepped on if the trouble was coming from a new ray. Must be something like that. Static didn't happen along on the hour. Blandon remembered the two outbursts had come at 8 and 9. The last one must have begun exactly at 9 o'clock. Every hour on the hour—10 o'clock would be a good time to get set for it.

His reasoning was correct. A few seconds after his battered alarm clock marked the hour, the head set began anew its wild clacking. Blandon listened for a minute, then idly began to turn his tuning dial. Up he went past four hundred meters, to four hundred and fifty, to five hundred, five ten, five twenty, five forty. At five fifty, he caught it.

"April sixth 10 p. m."

A voice thundered out from the receivers lying there on the table.

"April sixth, 10 p. m." The message was repeated. On and on went the voice. It was deep and sonorous, a voice of culture. Over and over it repeated the four words:

"April sixth, 10 p. m." Then without warning the message ceased. Blandon's clock showed that it was five minutes after 10. The head set was silent now, a dull inanimate object that seemed impossible of vocalism. Blandon stared at it stupidly, trying to get some meaning out of the message. "April sixth, 10 p. m." Silly thing. There was no sense to it. Probably some advertising stunt to get people's attention. This was April fourth. Two more days to wait. Nothing to get excited about. Even if the voice did sound awesome coming out of the vast spaces of the air, it did not necessarily mean anything. The lonesome mountains were getting on his nerves. He laughed reassuringly, then tuned in for the station whose jazz had entertained him earlier in the evening. There was no jazz now. The announcer was trying to explain away that strange message. It had been heard all over the United States. Reports were coming in constantly by telegram and telephone. The announcer advanced the theory of some clever publicity stunt, but his announcement lacked conviction.

Blandon could not do anything more, so he went to bed, tired of conjectures. He was spared the thousand theories that leaped from the front pages of every paper published in America the next morning. Government experts used a lot of wise words without telling anything. However, they promised the station would

be located. It was just a matter of hours. One brilliant feature writer advanced the theory that it was the first communication from Mars. The strange ray, the superpower of a minor wave length, the equal intensity of reproduction of that majestic voice all over the country, even in Japan and the Continent, he advanced in support of his argument. He passed over the ability of the Martians to speak English and follow the Gregorian calendar.

THE night of April fifth found bedtime stories forgotten and concerts wasted on the empty air, while sets were attuned to five hundred and fifty meters. Perhaps that strange voice would again ride the ether. The national supposition was correct. Three times that night the cryptic message thundered out:

"April sixth, 10 p. m."

At 8, at 9 and at 10 just those same words roared across the air, repeated at each hour for five minutes. Where, why? These two questions sent a nation to sleepless beds.

Breakfast tables next morning saw eggs grow cold and coffee untasted, while the message was discussed. A few churches opened their doors for special services. Superstition began its growth in a soil of wild conjecture. The newspapers had wilder and wilder conjectures as to the source of the message. The new death ray was hauled out, repolished and fitted with yet more weird powers than originally predicted in the fertile minds of the weavers of tales. From end to end the country hurried from its tables in the evening to make sure that radio instruments were in working order.

Blandon perforce did his own surmising in a day of complete idleness. He was to have begun a survey of his property. It was time that he decided what he would do with the three thousand acres of hillside and valley set down in the mountains of Tennessee. Two years overseas and seven years of inconsistent effort had left nothing except the foundations of engineering he had absorbed at school and in his various undertakings. When he was a small boy an uncle once lived on this property. Blandon visited him and saw shining bits of gold washed out of a small stream on the property. It was from this gold his uncle lived. There was not enough to mine on a large scale, there was just sufficient color in the gravelly bed of the creek to support one whose tastes were simple.

But in the broad acres there was possibility of another gold—wheat, corn, perhaps tobacco, surely hay and stock. So Blandon had come to claim his heritage and settle down to the business of feeding the world, and incidentally himself. However, the growth of the soil waited on this bright day of spring, because he was afraid to start his tour of exploration. He might not be able to make it back to his tent by night, and along with millions throughout the country he was going to be at his receivers if it were humanly possible. Of course, it was just some stunt, but it was a good one and he did not want to miss it. To make sure he wouldn't, he was through with his scant supper by 6 o'clock and listening in. He amused himself listening to the dot and dash of the international code while he awaited the beginning of the regular broadcasting programs.

He found his favorite station, but it bored him. He seemed to detect a half-heartedness in the work of the orchestra, as though it would rather be somewhere else to listen. It was the same wherever he attuned his ears, and the hands of his clock barely crawled around. At last it was 9 o'clock. Blandon removed the receivers from his ears, tuned in for five hundred and fifty meters and sat back to wait. Outside there was a

faint yapping in the distance, a fox squirrel barking in the tree tops. Katydids called to one another, and birds chirped drowzily in the thicket around the tent. Inside, the clock ticked its slow way down the hill of minutes. Blandon tried to read, but the words some ambitious writer had laid so neatly end to end were simply words with the cunning joints all gone awry. It was almost 10 o'clock.

It was very still in the tent. Blandon heard none of the night voices without. A hush seemed to have settled down over the world.

"April sixth 10 p. m. has come," the majestic voice began without warning. No announcer paved the way for the statement, and once more that feeling of awe swept over Blandon. "I have a message for the United States and the world," the voice went on. Each syllable was distinct, and the little tent was filled with the volume of the tone. "It is a message and a warning. The message is this: War must cease. I have the power to end it. Who I am does not matter. What I can do is all that counts. In order to convince you I will not use words. I will prove my power to destroy completely and beyond reconstruction anything that I desire. The first proof shall come April seventh at 10 p. m. Across the Missouri River from Great Falls, Montana, there is a brewery building. At 10 p. m. exactly, April seventh, this structure will be destroyed. I warn all persons to be clear of it at that time. There is danger to anyone within two hundred yards of the building. April seventh, 10 p. m."

The voice ceased as suddenly as it began. After its measured cadences the quiet was almost tangible. Blandon sat listening for more. Nothing came. The mysterious message was ended, and the world was trying to realize what was meant.

"Madman" was the consensus of the press the next morning. Some monomaniac who was suffering from delusions of grandeur able to get hold of a powerful radio set-up, and thus imagined he could do more. Yet behind this casual dismissal, there was a hint of disturbance. Was he a faker? The feature writer with the Martian theory was undismayed at its sudden failure. He had another offer—an inventor was trying to sell a death ray at a big profit, so he took this method of advertising.

In Great Falls the curious gathered around the brewery, a string of cars filing across the bridge over the Missouri all day long. Parties drove up from Helena and down from Havre. A trainload came over from Butte. Early in the afternoon the building was deserted, but a ring of curious thousands encircled the brick structure, settled down to wait until 10 o'clock. The afternoon press might carry on with the theory that the sender of the message was a madman, but that crowd was not going to miss the show. Yet others were not in that circle of the curious, but were aboard trains hurrying away from Great Falls, afraid of a mere two hundred yard radius of safety.

The day for Blandon was one of complete idleness. He did not get a hundred yards away from his tent. He sat in the shade of a towering black walnut tree, while his terrier barked at squirrels and pursued fleeing cottontails to safety in briar thickets. He believed the message, believed that the man who delivered it would deliver again that night. His years in France had taught him to consider the unbelievable. He had learned how a man might come to hate war beyond all telling, and so hating, work to its abolition through a superforce. Why not a ray that would destroy matter in its visible form? Less than half a century ago Marconi would have been called a maniac. Why, less than a century

before, a bathtub was considered a menace to health! Man's mind was moving faster than at any period in its history. Just before he started out on his self-imposed hermitage he had examined pictures that had been transmitted by radio. In a few hours he would be listening to concerts, speeches, songs from all over the United States, yet he was fifteen miles from the nearest railroad. Blandon believed that 10 o'clock would bring a new surprize to a world which was always being surprized.

But if the voice could destroy buildings at will, what then? What would he do to prevent war? Some nation would get hold of his ray, and it would be all to do over again. He was not changing human nature. He was glad that the inventor was an American. At least, his voice sounded like one, and he had chosen the United States for his demonstration. Blandon fell asleep in the drowzy warmth of the afternoon.

When night fell on the Montana plains, fires sprang up around the doomed brewery, because there was the chill of frost in the air. Some of the early arrivals returned home. Nothing happened, so nothing probably would happen. The fact that the hour set was 10 o'clock did not matter materially. The building had been searched thoroughly by the sheriff and his deputies. From the Boston and Montana smelters a group of engineers had come over for a further inspection. Other than yawning tanks and the idle machinery of a more joyous day, there was nothing in the brewery, except a watchman. He, too, left at dusk to join the waiting circle. He could see everything that went on; besides, fifteen thousand volunteers were on hand to help him see.

In the air the hours wore on as though nothing impended. Radio programs went forward on schedule, but not exactly the same. The air of expectancy that had marked the previous night, when the world was waiting for the message, was more than expectancy. It was anxiety. Of course, nothing was going to happen, but if it did? They asked themselves the question Blandon could not answer. What would it mean? Where would it lead? There was no answer.

At 6:30 it was dark outside the brewery. Automobiles were brought up to the edge of the crowd, and their lights turned on. The building stood out in a blaze from hundreds of glaring lights beating upon it. The tension in the crowd grew. Earlier in the afternoon there had been bantering and derisive jeers. Now everyone was growing serious. There were stirrings as persons stretched their cramped muscles. Few dared look long away from the building. The hour might be wrong, and they had come to see.

Back in Tennessee Blandon was trying to fasten his attention on his favorite orchestra. When that failed he sought a book. But what was printed romance when he was on the verge of being present at the introduction of a new mystery? His technical self yearned to be in Montana in order that he might witness the spectacle. How would the building be destroyed? Would it be an explosion? Hardly, since the sender of the message had placed the radius of safety at two hundred yards. Bricks would carry much farther than that. Would it be a sudden fire? So rapid a combustion would create such a tremendous heat it could not be borne comfortably within an eighth of a mile, if the buildings were any size. It was a brewery, so it could not be small. Would the building disintegrate—some sort of harmonic vibration stuff? That was hard to conceive. It was all unbelievable, yet Blandon believed.

Some of the thousands gathered around the building were believing,

too. The minutes were speeding by, and the spell of night and the glowing structure in the center of the living ring wove a spell. They were ready to believe anything, expected to witness miracles.

"What time is it?" someone called.

"Five minutes to 10," a score of voices answered, and none of them was firm.

The seconds ticked by, while the crowd sat still. There were no stirrings now. The force of the concentrated gaze upon it was enough to crush the building. Across the river a clock started to boom:

"One, two, three, four, five——"

"Look!" screamed a woman.

A shudder seemed to pass over the building. It rippled from foundation to roof. For a second or two the lights shimmered back from the glazed bits of shivering brick, where smoothed facets of sand crystals caught the light. Then the solid bricks apparently grew liquid, twisting for a fraction of a second in waves and wrinkles. There was no sound until now there came a mighty "Whoosh," and the lights were beating through clouds of dust as thick as the densest fogs. The crowd fought for breath as the clouds descended. When they ceased their coughing the lights were beating on a pile of reddish dust, where the brewery had stood.

2

At midnight in the Tennessee hills fifteen hundred miles east of Great Falls there was a momentary gap in the program to which Blandon was listening, a brief blank in which the receiver registered not even a buzz of static, then things went on as before. It was uncanny, that fractional moment of dead silence, and Blandon felt again that sense of awe. He connected it with the warning and the voice. Within fifteen minutes, he knew he was correct:

"The Associated Press reports from Great Falls, Montana, that the brewery designated by the mysterious message last night was destroyed at exactly 10 o'clock Mountain Time," the announcer cut in. "A brief bulletin states that the building crumbled into dust. An investigation is being made to discover what force was used and how the depredation was committed."

Later reports came, but there was nothing more to add. Before thousands of startled eyes a building of brick and stone and steel and wood shimmered into finest dust. All that was in the building returned with it to original matter. The first hurried investigations had found nothing solid, not even a nail or a bit of rust. Only dust was there, finer than the smoothest powder, an agglomerate mass that would require expert chemical analysis to derive its content.

At 12:30 there were new alarms. Out of the ether came that wild din which had set the world talking a few days before. Stations stopped broadcasting, and every receiver that could function attuned itself to the powerful wave that could blow buildings to dust.

"My first point is proved. My second will be offered April eighth at 10 p. m. The quadrangle at Fort Sam Houston will be destroyed. I warn all persons to be clear of the building by two hundred yards."

The message ceased. Blandon waited, but the voice of warning was silent. Saxophones were blaring out into space, but the voice which threatened a world was still. Blandon pulled out the plug from his set and went outside the tent. He wanted space, he wanted a sense of freedom. The threat of unlimited power the voice brought was not to be endured within the narrow walls of his canvas tent. Overhead the stars were shining down on the peaceful Tennessee valley. Life was flowing as smoothly as it had flowed

before this monstrous thing had come out of the air. It would flow on when the thing was passed. The stars overhead, a pipe, a mocking bird calling from a near-by thicket—these were real. Voices that spoke warnings and shook buildings to atomic dust—dream stuff.

The next morning the world might well have rubbed its eyes to make sure it was not dreaming. Every paper in the world carried the amazing story of the building that was only a heap of dust beside the Missouri River at Great Falls. Column on column tried to describe the sight of the night before, though no two of the thousands could tell alike what had occurred. Only one thing was sure: the voice that had warned had fulfilled its warning, and now there was yet another.

Scientists tried to calm a troubled public mind. It poohed at mysterious rays. It derided any power that would act over unlimited space at any one designated spot. Explosives of some new type—yes. That was possible, it was probable. Some chemical reagent that would destroy form would be found easily. But as for etheric force—it was absurd. No mere proof like a building crumbled to powder could make them believe it. They offered no explanations as to the placing of explosives that could not be discovered, of the arrangements for releasing a chemical that could destroy metal, mineral and vegetable in the twinkling of an eye, at a specified moment. They denied the existence of something that their laboratories had not yet produced.

The public mind would not be calmed. It focused itself on Texas, the quadrangle at Fort Sam Houston, which was to shimmer in the night, break into waves of decomposition and settle to the earth in cosmic powder. And that part of the public within travel radius of Fort Sam Houston either rushed where it might be present at the cataclysm or rushed that it might be as far away as trains could carry it.

There were no crowds to witness the destruction of the quadrangle. General Josiah Hodgkiss saw to that. He pished the whole business. Except for the arguments of his colonels he would have posted a squad in the old structure to see that nothing went wrong. Double sentries patrolled the entrances to the reservation surrounded by thousands of cars and tens of thousands of persons who had come to be at hand, even though they could not see, when this new menace functioned again.

All over the world men sat awaiting the news that would be flashed over every wire leading out of San Antonio. Government was in this thing now, and all traffic was suspended five minutes before the hour. The fort was connected by telephone with the telegraph offices, and observers were ready to announce the destruction of the building. All officers were as near the quadrangle as they dared, carefully failing to observe shadowy forms in the background—enlisted men who had refused to hear taps.

The last guards were called from the quadrangle. Powerful searchlights, placed during the day, were beating upon the structure, bathing it in a refulgence more brilliant than the light of several suns. Watches in hand, the observers waited, ticking off the minutes. The 10 o'clock call from a silvery bugle broke upon the night. A bar, and then a sustained "ah," from hundreds of throats.

Once more startled eyes beheld solid matter shimmer like the still surface of a pond when a soft breeze disturbs the moon's reflection, then that twisting and turning, as though suddenly liquid, solid stone would splash down in a torrent. Instead of the torrent came a blinding cloud on

the wings of the giant "whoosh," and the onlookers choked in the stifling swirl. The clouds settled, the air was almost clear, and there in the glare of the searchlights was a pile of reddish dust.

The world did not stop to worry over this new devastation. It sat waiting for the ether to bring forth the majestic voice announcing new dreads. The world was not disappointed. While whirls of dust eddied up occasionally from the great pile that marked the historic old quadrangle, the wings of the air carried the voice of mystery.

"My second demonstration has been made. April ninth at 10 p. m. I will destroy The Breakers on the Isle of Palms near Charleston, South Carolina. Keep clear of the building."

Just that, but it was enough. There was no one to doubt now, and though explanations were printed by the score, the churches were crowded that day with those who refused to believe that mortal could wreak such havoc. Boats streamed out from Charleston to the Isle of Palms. Human curiosity must be satisfied. An afternoon newspaper, departing from the dignity of the press which once held the South Carolina city in its thrall, commented proudly on the fact that Charleston should have been chosen for one of the demonstrations.

The reporter who wrote the story was one of the thousands that ringed about the rambling frame hotel, whose glories were dead, whose life was to be shorter than the memory of the many summer flirtations it once had housed under the guise of romance. It was not much of a building now; bare of paint in broad patches; window blind sagging from broken hinges; panes mere memories; doors ajar on wide verandas that shook with the palsy of age in passing breezes. All of it was bathed in glaring lights that brought out starkly each sign of decay.

Yet never in the proudest days of its popularity had the hotel drawn such earnest gaze as was bent upon it now from intent thousands, most of them holding watches in hand, ticking off the minutes as they hastened on to the appointed hour. No search of the building was made this time. They feared its sagging floors and creaking stairs might give way before the master power scattered its cosmic dust. They all were satisfied that what would destroy it was beyond discovery by a mere search here. Impatiently they waited the action of that power.

It came to the instant, as before. Yet there was a difference. The disintegration began without warning and ended in the cloud of dust. But they saw no rippling shimmer along the weather-beaten boards as brick and stone had quivered before. Instead the building was there and suddenly it was not. Only blinding clouds of dust drove them, choking, to cover their faces in order that they might breathe. Yet when the clouds had settled or were carried away on a breeze out toward the sea, the same pile of reddish dust marked the spot where once had stood the hotel. Somewhere in the crowd a woman sobbed, for the happy hours she had known on the polished floor beneath the massive beams that now mingled together in the dust heap.

The destruction of the hotel faded into insignificance the next morning in the press, beside the greater news of the message following the destruction, a message that must have astounded the very ether that bore it. As before it came within fifteen minutes after the dread force had whirled solid matter into a powder that chemists could not classify. There was not a paper published that morning of April tenth which did not

carry the message in full. It adorned the breakfast tables of a startled world.

"I have proved my power," the strange voice had said; "unless my instructions are followed, I will use it to the full. I address myself to the President and the Congress of these United States. War must cease, and the United States must show the way. I demand that the United States disarm. By May first there is not to be one man under arms, except the necessary civil police. Ships of war must be in process of dismantling. The work of tearing down forts must be under way. Manufactories devoted to the making of munitions of war must be ready for conversion to peaceful ends. All means for war by the United States must be abolished or in the process of abolition by May first. If this demand is not complied with, I will destroy the Capitol of the United States when Congress is in session immediately after that date."

The hysteria that swept the United States full-armed into the Great War was but a passing breath to the wave of fear, of wrath, of wild suggestions that caught hold of the country as that message was grasped. The business of the world stood still in those first hours of dread while man stared at man in bewilderment that this thing should happen.

Disarm the United States? It was preposterous. It was an enemy power seeking to frighten the country into a state of helplessness in order that it might step in and despoil the land of wealth. California pointed warning fingers across the Pacific. "Bolshevik," cried the Eastern money markets. The calmer heads kept up their cry of "madman."

But a madman could not explain those three heaps of cosmic dust: one along the banks of the Missouri; a second on the sun-baked plains of Texas; a third in the savannas of South Carolina. A madman did not dream those. Perhaps it was a madman who created them, but he was a lunatic with the power of Jove, hurling lightnings at any spot he desired. Now he threatened the Capitol of the nation, unless it strip itself of defense, lay its vulnerable sides bare to a world which had not yet shown itself free from rapacity and greed. Ask the householder to take the locks from his doors, the catches from his windows and strew his valuables so that a burglar might find them readily. This in effect was what the message meant to the country.

Yet, if the President and Congress did not agree, what then? Destroy the Capitol and Congress assembled? Would he do it? He had the power—would he use it? Would he blot out all those lives? It was not possible! Had he not warned everyone to stay clear of those buildings that were destroyed? He gave a whole day's notice each time. Yet they were only warnings. This was in dead earnest.

When Congress assembled that morning of April tenth the clerks of Senate and House marked no absentees. Three members left sick beds to be on hand. One senator had traveled all night to answer to roll call. The President drove to the Capitol before Congress convened. All night he had been preparing his message. He, too, had heard the warning as it rode the waves of ether to drive a nation into panic, a world into trembling uncertainty. He was serious with a great purpose, as he mounted the steps and turned toward the House wing before a silent crowd that stared after him with anxious eyes. The Senate, apprized of his coming, was sitting in full membership with the House. The galleries were filled, not with gaily dressed chattering throngs, but men and women with anxious air and concern written large on every face. In its century and a half of existence the country had known no such crisis. None of its heads had been called up-

on for such momentous advice as this man must give to its Congress and its alarmed people.

That address made history. It made the man who delivered it a living figure in the pages of the country's record. He spoke quietly, almost softly, yet behind his words and his voice was a reassuring power of force and determination. A listening nation heard it, because every station in the country broadcast it as he spoke. Those who did not hear, read it as extras were torn from whirring presses to be scattered by flying newsboys among waiting millions. The papers could give but little impression of that scene in the halls of Congress, when the head of the nation called for the protection of the nation against a mysterious force that threatened the very existence of the world.

There was no other sound as he delivered his message of reassurance to those who might be wavering. His was no timid soul, yet the bravest might well have quailed before the dilemma he faced. Obey the impossible demands and leave the country fair game for any bandit! Refuse to obey and see the heart of its government wiped out, should the warning be executed! Would it be executed?

The President read that warning as he began his speech, stressing its preposterous demands. Disarm the richest nation in the world to the point where the feeblest might ravish it! This picture he painted for Congress to see. Ships and forts, men and arms—these to be abolished completely; destruction of factories where arms and armament might be provided. This was what was asked of these men chosen to direct and protect a nation. And unless they did these things, they, these men, would be blotted out from life as though they had never been.

He did not attempt to minimize this threat. Instead he discussed earnestly the probability of its being carried to its conclusion. He pointed out the danger these chosen representatives of a people faced, yet he did it calmly, with nothing of fear in his words. Then he explained their duty to the millions who had chosen them from among the many, the special few who might direct the whole. Through them this mysterious power was to cowe a nation. Would they be cowed?

Never. He answered his own question. He promised them most solemnly that every energy of the country would be bent toward locating the man who controlled the mysterious force that blotted out matter, and to the destruction of that force before the first of May, the day set for the destruction of the seat of government unless impossible demands were met.

In a tense silence he called upon Congress to remain firm. He pledged them that should a search discover nothing, should the source of this power still be a mystery by the first of May, he, the President of the United States, would meet with Congress during every session after that date.

For a moment as he finished, there was silence, a hush of approval. Then the walls of the chamber rang with cheers as House and Senate rose to its feet to acclaim a leader without fear.

All that day Blandon longed for a newspaper, so he might know what was going on. What would the country do? Would Congress run? He had joined his voice with the others in calling it a pretty sorry mess, but that was in the days of peace. In a crisis it had always showed its strength. Would it fail now in this greatest crisis ever faced by a nation? He heard the speech of the President, then he had to wait, while regular broadcasting stations picked up the events as they transpired. The Capitol was disconnected, while

House and Senate worked out a plan to meet the danger.

Just at nightfall all of his questions were answered. In solemn tones from a hundred stations the message went out with the authority of the President:

"The United States will not disarm. We will arm to fight this new peril. All citizens are called upon to help destroy this agent that menaces the world."

4

CALM counsel was well enough, but it could not soothe a frightened public. Danger lurked on every hand, The mob mind held sway. Every power station was a potential source of this menace that threatened the world. In New York four men were killed in a light sub-station; three were wounded in Chicago; others were beaten up by volunteer mobs searching for the hidden plant which directed the terrible force. The spy scares of the early days of America's participation in the great war were re-enacted, but with doubled and trebled intensity. No amateur practising with radio was safe from suspicion. Scientists were accorded police protection after the first two days, while all the official forces of federal, state and city government went seriously about the business of finding the source of the weird ray.

Blandon chafed at the fate which had put him so far from civilization at a time like this. He realized that there was nothing he could do; his war training had taught him that the untrained individual usually retards the efforts of a trained organization, but he wanted to be fighting this thing. It was easy in France, because there were tangibilities which might be shot at or run through. Here was nothing; only a voice in the air at night and an etheric vibration so terrible in its potentialities that the red glow of war paled beside it.

It was the third day after the warning that Blandon set out on his tour of inspection. He listened to the messages that were broadcast every night. Gone were the concerts now; the bedtime stories were forgotten; market reports made way for a new brand of four-minute speakers, urging calm upon a troubled people. Reports of progress were made, but they lacked anything definite; mere statements that the search for the source of the mysterious ray was being pushed to the utmost and that it would be found. He was spared the rumors, and rumors of rumors, which filled the press each morning and afternoon, yet nothing reassuring came in the carefully guarded speeches through the air. He had to do something, so Blandon strapped a pack to his back, drew a line through the thirteenth of April on his calendar, tied the flaps to his tent and set out to view the inheritance he had come to claim.

He felt the futility of it, in spite of the warm April sunshine. Why worry about what he had, when only seventeen days were left before the country might be thrown into chaos beyond comprehension, with all the world to follow suit? There was nothing on his dog's mind. The pup knew they were off, and he capered around, barking at fleeting shadows, pursuing sleepy cottontails, running back to whine in eagerness at Blandon's feet.

It was all far removed from any hint of disaster, with young leaves lifting themselves to greet the April morning. One could think of nothing but peace here, and Blandon lost himself in the joy of spring in Southern mountains as he followed the dog through self-made trails in the underbrush. He marveled at how the wilderness had claimed this land he was now traversing. When he was a youngster long stretches of open corn and hay waved to the summer

breezes. Scrub oaks, jack pines and the nondescript shrubs of cut-over land wiped out any trace of the farming of two decades before. Yet its very wildness made him sure that there lay independence when the fertility of the ground was subjugated to his plans.

It was hot work finding a way through the tangle. He came to a grove of large trees in their virgin state, where he loitered to estimate the amount of timber that could be cut. Cutting it would be easy but getting it to market was a problem. Its sale would help him develop the farm. He remembered that at one end of his property there was a creek. During a heavy rain on the earlier visit it was a brawling torrent, able to float logs. Eventually it joined up with the Tennessee River. The timber could be got out that way.

After lunch beside a burbling spring, Blandon set out to find the creek. As he remembered, it was about ten miles west of where he had pitched his tent. He recalled a tiny waterfall about three miles down its course. He wanted to look that over and make sure it would not interfere with logging operations. His progress was slower than in the morning, and the sun was beating down in an unusual outburst of heat for April. It was 4 o'clock before he came to his creek, which wasn't a creek after all.

"When was the flood?" Blandon questioned himself. The creek of his boyhood was now a small lake, a quarter of a mile across, brimming the canyon along whose floor it once wandered. The lake stretched north along the course of the stream for a mile before it ended against the foot of a cliff through which the creek tumbled. To the south he saw where it narrowed at the canyon's mouth.

"What's happened up in this wilderness?" he wondered. There was a mystery about the sudden growth of a brook which once was not a dozen feet across. No evidences of civilization were here; no path along the water's edge, where the tops of small trees showed above the surface. The trees were long since dead, and the silt along the bank showed the rise and fall of many months. Who or what had brought about the change? Blandon started south to investigate.

If the going had been difficult before, it was doubly so now, because the land ceased to be rolling. Tumbled rocks and sharp breaks in the contour marked the age-old earth tremor that hewed out the original path for the creek that was now a lake, dimpling under the rush of a small breeze heralding the sunset. Dusk was approaching when he came to the wooded cliffs, rising sheer from the water's edge, at whose feet once tumbled the creek for a mile or more before it cascaded over a shelf of rock to a lower level, some fifteen feet down.

He climbed over broken rubble and time-rounded boulders to the top of the cliffs. He could no longer follow the lake edge, because the timber growth was too thick, so he skirted along, two or three hundred yards back. Everything was still. Nothing indicated that this was not virgin forest he was traversing. Perhaps some rock fall in the narrow cut between the cliffs had dammed up the creek years ago. This theory did not suit Blandon. He felt a growing mystery at this lake born from a trickling stream of his youth.

He came to a sharp break in the rocky land, almost a crevasse. This, he remembered, was a trail down to the waterfall. He had climbed up this narrow earth scar as a boy. With his dog going ahead, he proceeded to clamber down it now. There was no evidence of the waterfall. It had been still when he was walking through the woods, but down in this narrow cut in the earth, without a

breath of air for the stirring of leaves and twigs, the absence of sound weighed upon him. He should have heard the tumbling of the waters over the smooth ledge that broke the bed of the watercourse.

Suddenly the cut turned and widened. Blandon halted on a narrow ledge, amazed.

In place of the waterfall was a wall of concrete towering thirty feet in the air from the old creek bed. The lake was within two feet of its top, which stretched about ninety feet between the almost perpendicular walls of the canyon. Near the other bank stood a concrete building, huddling at the foot of the wall. It was a power station, yet no gleaming wires of copper led away from it. Then he noticed the towers.

There were five of them. Between two stretched the familiar aerial of the broadcasting station. Apart from them stood the other three. They were at the corners of an equilateral triangle, he surmised automatically. Their bases he could not see, they were beyond the buildings. No aerials looped between them. At the top, however, were queer clusters. In the fading light and at a distance he could not tell what they were.

Stock-still, Blandon tried to understand what was wrong. Then he realized that no one was in sight. There was no humming of dynamos. He looked down the stream, but he saw no evidence of the outlet from the turbines that must be there. And over it all was that same dread silence he had been fighting against.

The dog broke the stillness. When Blandon stopped, it had halted, waving an aimless tail. Impatience conquered, however, and with a short yap it started down the cut, ready to investigate anything that lay ahead. Darkness shut in suddenly, and Blandon followed the dog. At least the buildings offered shelter, and a watchman must be somewhere around. His surmises were interrupted by a scurry of small stones as his dog leaped down the crevasse. One short, terrified howl startled him, and the silence settled down again.

HURRIEDLY Blandon made his way over the fallen stones. He reached the end of the cut. It was too dark now to make out the stones, but the howl of the dog, and the engulfing silence, made Blandon hesitate to use the flashlight he carried. What had happened to his dog? Who or what was it ahead that had silenced him so completely? Blandon listened intently, but he could hear nothing. He snapped on his light, and swung it straight ahead to where he had last heard the animal.

There was nothing, at least there was no dog. The light disclosed a wire fence of curious weave. It was not more than three feet high, but it must have been a foot thick. It reminded him of the circular woven nets that fishermen use for minnows. He swept his light along it, and the fence continued out of range in each direction, but he saw no sign of the dog. He swung the light back, and then he noticed a break in the smooth weave of that queer fence directly in front of him.

For a space of six or eight inches, the wires facing him seemed to have been fused. The surface glistened under the light. The disappearance of the dog was still unexplained. On that rocky floor the tracks of any animal that might have carried him off would be obliterated. He might have leaped the fence. That was it. He had jumped over and fallen down the cliff face. That explained his howl of fright, cut short as he struck the boulders on the creek bed forty feet below. And as Blandon explained it away, he gave up all his theories in a new astonishment.

Light as brilliant as the day broke about him. Automatically he leaped

backward, caught his heel on a stone and fell. It was hours later when he struggled back to consciousness. His head throbbed in agony. He felt the back of his head dumbly. He found the hair matted with blood from a cut, which now was caked over. It was several minutes before he could bring himself back to the reality of his surroundings. At last he remembered. The light!

It was gone now, and there was no evidence that it ever was. The same deadly stillness held the night. As he wondered about the lights, he realized suddenly what was in the silence to oppress him. Here in the spring, when every leaf should carry its chirping cricket and the woods should be alive with the twitterings of birds and the ground astir with the furtive footsteps of small night life, not so much as the whir of a mosquito broke the silence. It had been so for the last half hour through the woods. Except for the vegetation there was no life here but his.

As the realization came to him, Blandon started up abruptly, then sank back. Those lights might come on again, and he was frankly afraid—almost trembling with a fear that he could not name or control. Cautiously he rolled over on his face, raised himself on his hands and knees and crawled back up the cut. Not until he was almost to the end of the narrow cut did he raise himself to his feet, and scramble hurriedly for the surface. Back on the cliff tops, he faced south and in a desperate haste fought his way through brambles and underbrush. He was fleeing the silence.

Exhaustion brought him to a halt. He must have traveled two miles, before he dropped panting beneath a tree. For minutes he lay there, getting back his wind, dripping with perspiration in spite of the chill of spring in the air.

The drowzy chirping of a bird overhead aroused him. He sat up. Around him was the tuning and scraping of cricket fiddles. In a little patch of moonlight he saw a cottontail hop along. In the distance he heard the yapping of a fox squirrel. There was life about him now. The nameless fear dropped from him, and Blandon was ashamed of that mad rush through the dark. Sleep overwhelmed his shame, and with his pack for a pillow he took the chirping of the drowzy bird for a lullaby.

He awoke in the gray of dawn, chilled through and his head throbbing almost beyond endurance. He was thirsty and hungry. A search of his pack disclosed that his sack of food was missing. He must have lost it somewhere in that wild dash through the night. He did not have the strength to go back for it now, but he must have water. Painfully he dragged himself to his feet, leaving the pack on the ground. His vision was blurred by the pain in his head and his feet refused to obey his will readily. Stumbling blindly, falling at times, he found his way to the banks of the valley where the creek flowed. A bend hid the dam and buildings of the night before from sight. The cliffs had given way to sloping banks. He started to walk down, but his progress was more of a slide through thicket and briar, each move adding to the pain in his head. When he reached the floor of the valley the sun was up. His thirst was intolerable.

He heard the thin trickle of a stream a hundred yards ahead, and he made his way to the creek on his hands and knees to bury his face in the water. Its coolness revived him, assuaged in part the agony of his head, but he was too weak to rise immediately. He drank again and managed to get to his feet, to stand swaying as he looked around him. He could see the dam now two miles up the

valley. The building was invisible. The face of the dam itself seemed to melt into the rocky walls of the canyon and become a part of them.

Blandon knew the buildings were there, so someone must be near. He needed food, and his head required attention. It was fifteen miles or more to his camp. He could never reach it in his condition. He would have to try that gray building so artfully concealed. Hatless, under a sun that was growing warm as it mounted higher, he began to pick his way along the edge of the creek. He could make no more than fifty yards at a time without sitting down to rest, falling rather than sitting. Each time he found it more difficult to arise.

"Foolish to be in this fix," he thought. "Going to pass away in Tennessee from hunger and a rap on the head. Silly. Must be a railroad right over there." He waved his hand vaguely. With thought of avoiding the sun, he crossed the valley where a gentle slope was shaded by tall trees. He was an hour covering the first mile. The second was a trail of agony. He did not know how many hours passed nor where he was going. Suddenly he halted.

Woven wire, like the seine fishermen use for minnows, lay across his path not ten feet away. Through a break in the trees he caught sight of the dam and the buildings at its base. What was that wire doing here? It had stopped his dog the night before. He didn't like it. It looked suspicious. Mustn't touch that. Get away from there.

Growing delirious, Blandon turned to his left to climb up the slope parallel with the wire. It must lead somewhere. Wire like that didn't grow on trees. Somebody put it there. What did they do with his dog? He would make 'em pay for that. He started to sing, a song of his college days. He stepped on a round stone, which turned under his heel. He grasped a branch to check himself, and it came off rotten in his hands. In spite of his delirium, he tried to throw himself away from the wire as he fell. As he crashed to the ground, one arm struck a tree trunk and slewed him around, so that the fence was not a foot away.

That dread stillness was all about him again, but Blandon did not realize it. He was all but unconscious, his head seemed splitting. He did not hear a sudden break in the silence, footsteps coming hurriedly through the underbrush. They stopped. Then Blandon did hear as though from miles away:

"What's the matter? What are you doing here?"

He dreamed there was a girl standing over him.

SOMEWHERE a voice was pounding on Blandon's ears, a familiar ring to it, as though he were in classroom again listening to a lecture. It was an effort to open his eyes, to try to recall what had happened. He was lying in something soft and soothing, not the scarred hillside where he had dreamed of seeing a girl who spoke to him. He opened his eyes. He was in a neat bedroom, the walls in soft gray, the furniture simple. The voice was still sounding. Now he caught the words, and through his hazy mind they penetrated to his consciousness. It was some announcer at a broadcasting station, his voice amplified by a loud speaker. The words made Blandon forget his strange surroundings as he listened to the story of the outside world.

". . . . the President therefore calls upon every citizen to remain calm in this troublous period," the voice rolled sonorously. "Such disorders as have characterized the last two days in Boston only hamper the efforts of the government to locate

and destroy this strange power which is threatening our existence. The destruction of the church in which thousands were praying for deliverance will be a dark blot on our history through all the ages to come. Citizens who are deceived into joining organizations to fight the government's resistance to the mysterious threat will find themselves part of such riots as resulted in the conflagration in St. Paul. The ignorant mob is taking advantage of this occasion for race conflict in California and the South. Men and women of wisdom are called upon to put down these disorders which are as threatening to the safety of our nation as any matter-destroying force."

The voice ceased suddenly.

Blandon looked around him. The sunlight was streaming redly through a western window, so he knew it was late afternoon. That was a bad blow he had received. He tried to roll over. The movement brought an involuntary groan. At the sound there was a stir outside his room, and the door opened.

Framed in the doorway was a girl, the girl he dreamed he saw just before he lost consciousness. So she wasn't a dream after all, that tall girl with the air and the blond beauty of the vikings. Five feet nine inches, Blandon would have guessed her height. In her simple draperies she would have brought exclamations of delight from a sculptor. The red of the sunset was meshed in her hair. Eyes as blue as any lake were contemplating him with level gaze. When she saw that he was awake, her eyes grew speculative, narrowing to a question. Then the look cleared, as she stepped into the room.

"Don't try to move." Her voice matched her eyes. "You are about done up. I am glad to see you are awake. How do you feel?"

"I don't know." Blandon managed a smile. "Rather knocked about. Did you bring me here?"

"Yes, I found you yesterday. How did you get here?" More than curiosity shaded her tone as she asked the question. The eyes were intent.

"I live near here. My name is Douglas Blandon. I was exploring."

"I am Hilda Thorsby. What were you exploring, Mr. Blandon?" Her voice was grave.

"My property. I haven't been on it since I was a boy. The creek, or rather what used to be the creek, ran through one end of it. I found the lake there, and followed it down here to your place. That's quite a power plant. Is it yours?"

A voice from the doorway interrupted. "You are an engineer, then, Mr. Blandon?" The owner of the voice needed no introduction, for it was easy to see he was the girl's father. A full head taller, he towered above her, but his glowing thatch and steely blue eyes showed where she had drawn her color scheme.

"Once, Mr. Thorsby, I believe," Blandon smiled politely. "Knocked around at it in college, went overseas with the engineers and played at it since the war. I am going to be a farmer now. That is, if anything is left of me." He felt gingerly at his head. He pulled up his right foot, and groaned again. He noticed for the first time it was bandaged. The father and daughter were watching him steadily.

"You have sprained your ankle. Did someone attack you?" the girl questioned him.

"No. I fell last night." Blandon felt a constraint in explaining his fear at the bright light which had beat about him. He felt the tension in the attitude of these two people hidden here away in the mountains.

"How long have you been on your place, Mr. Blandon?" the man spoke.

"Almost a week now. I only have a tent. I wanted to look the property

over carefully before I decided what to do." The older man's face seemed to relax. His gaze was not so intent. The girl smiled at him.

"I am glad we are able to help you," she said. "You had better rest now. I will bring you dinner at 6. If you need anything, ring that bell." She pointed to the table beside him. "You will excuse us now."

They bowed formally and left the room, the girl smiling at him over her shoulder before she closed the door.

Blandon did not want to rest. He wanted to know who they were, what they were doing here. They had not been living here when he was a boy. Where were they living? He lifted himself, painfully, on one elbow to look out the window beside the bed. Below him, through a grove of trees that must have concealed the house effectively, he caught a glimpse of the dam and the lake sparkling in the sunlight. He could see steps leading down the bluff to the dam. What was the old boy making? The puzzle made his head ache, and Blandon rolled on his side. He heard a murmur outside his door. It soothed him, and he fell asleep.

It was dark when he opened his eyes at a soft movement of the door. It opened slowly and the girl looked in cautiously as though afraid of awakening him.

"I am awake, Miss Thorsby," he said. She switched on a light, and stood framed in the doorway again, a vivid portrait of life and youth and beauty.

"Do you think you could eat?" she asked him. Her voice was not gay. It was softly serious, yet she gave no impression of softness. There was a sense of definite purpose about her.

"I don't know of anything I couldn't eat." Blandon watched for her smile. It came, but it was serious, as was her voice. "I am sorry to put you to so much trouble," he added.

"It is no trouble. I am glad to be able to help you." This time she did not close the door as she went away. He could hear her walking down the hall, when the noise of her footsteps ended in a sonorous voice speaking round syllables in a firm tone:

". . . . reports are alarming. The smaller villages have been deserted, and near-by towns in the South report refugees by the hundreds streaming in. They bring little with them, and the problem of housing and——"

The voice ceased. Blandon realized it was the loud speaker receiving a report of a nation approaching chaos. It must have been in a sound-proof room. Thorsby probably opened the door to speak to the girl. What did he say? This was growing mysterious. Blandon felt a warning chill of the fear that had sent him rushing through the night. Fear of what? Before he had time to answer, the girl was at the door again, and he forgot his fear in the sheer beauty that clothed her. She walked with a stirring grace in every movement, a harmony of motion in the simple act of putting the tray down on the table beside him. The fragrance of April about her hair delighted him as she bent over to arrange the pillows at his back. There was decidedly nothing to fear.

"Do you live here alone with your father?" Blandon asked when everything was arranged and she turned as though to leave the room.

"Yes."

"Have you been here very long?"

"Eight years." Her voice took on a new note at the question and her gaze at him grew intent.

"Well, I am delighted to know I am going to have neighbors. When I came up last week they told me at the village that no one lived within twenty miles of my place."

"We never go to the village. You

will excuse me now, I must see my father."

Blandon awaited her return. An hour passed, and then she came with her father. He remained while Hilda carried out the tray.

"So you have played at engineering," he began. Blandon nodded.

"It is a game, but one may not play at it. I have given a life to it. I could have done no less. It has been worth it. Worth it." Thorsby was talking to himself more than to the man beside him on the bed. Blandon did not attempt to speak. "Life has taken away almost everything else, but it has left me work. Now my work will give more of life to the world. It is going to help save the world. Why did you give up engineering?" He turned to Blandon suddenly.

"It has given me up. I can't live at it, but I believe I can use it up here to make a living, possibly help other people live as you say your work will do. I will farm. How will you help the world, so far away from it?"

Thorsby stared at him fixedly. Behind the sternness of his gaze Blandon caught a light. He could not analyze it, but again that weird chill of the night before struck him.

"I am going to save the world in spite of itself," the older man said after a moment. Half musingly he went on, "The world does not seem able to save itself. The world is made up of little minds, and that is where the human being differs from all other units of matter. One may gather together many small stones and build a mountain. But one may get in one mob the millions of little minds in all the world, and there is nothing but one little mind in all that mass. Whichever way the little mind may veer, the mass will follow after. Little minds may not be made larger, but they may be made harmless. Some day it shall be."

"How?" Blandon asked it quietly.

"That answer will come in due time. You are tired now. It is better that you sleep. Good night." And without further ceremony Thorsby withdrew, closing the door behind him as he left and turning out the light.

BLANDON'S ankle was not sprained, he found out two days later, when he tried to rest his weight upon it. It was strained, however, but with effort he could walk, and then for the first time he was able to get out of doors and view his surroundings. The two days in bed had passed pleasantly enough except for the usual irritation of a normal man who is compelled to be quiet. The wound in his head was healing nicely, Hilda informed him, and the pain was gone. Hilda had been a perfect nurse. After that first night he had not seen Thorsby. He saw Hilda only rarely, except when her services were needed. An excellent library had kept him busy.

The cottage faced the lake. It was built of concrete, stained to blend with the hills and the woods. Vines clambered over a tiny porch, flagged with field stones which were used for the steps down the slope. At one end of the porch was a searchlight, mounted to command the power house and lake. That was the light he had feared, Blandon realized. Farther up the hill on its very crest stood another building. It was four-square, of concrete. Facing him was a door. The side of the building visible was solid. It was a hundred yards away, and the lower half was hidden in a tangle of underbrush. From a short pole with a cross arm on the top, wires stretched down in the direction of the power house. Steps led up to it from the cottage, passing through a tiny garden where vegetables were showing green sprouts and a chicken run resounded

with the chuckling talk of the hens. Pigs grunted from a near-by sty.

It was all very peaceful, and except for the solidity and good repair of the buildings, the scene was not out of place in the Tennessee hills in the springtime. Below, however, things were not so regular. Across the face of the lake stretched the dam. At the end near him were concrete mixers, barrows, building machinery that must have been used for the dam and power house. Below it he caught glimpses of the low concrete power house, with its five adjacent towers. What were they? He had planned to ask Thorsby about them after that first night's conversation, but he did not see him again. In the brief moments he was with Hilda the opportunity for questions had not arisen. Their reserve seemed so naturally a part of them, Blandon had not tried to break it, but he wanted to know something more of these new neighbors. What was the experiment?

Thorsby was coming up the hill from the power house. Blandon hobbled back to the porch and seated himself on a broad low bench beside the door.

"I am glad to see you out, sir," Thorsby greeted his guest. He stood for a moment looking out over the valley with eyes that saw thousands of miles beyond. Then he seated himself on the bench.

"It is good to be out," Blandon said. "I don't know how I will be able to repay you and Miss Thorsby for your kindness to me. You saved my life."

"I told you that was my business," Thorsby spoke gravely. "We are glad to have been of service." He was silent again, staring off beyond the lake all aglare in the bright sun.

"You are a long way from the center of things for saving lives, Mr. Thorsby," Blandon broke the silence.

"To escape the mob. How could I work with them prying around? They are curious. They are noisy. Out here is peace, and I have been able to think. I have been able to work."

"Did you build all this?" Blandon waved his hand about him.

"My daughter and I, literally. She is son and daughter and companion to me now. We were six months in getting the materials and construction machinery here. We brought it all on trucks. Fifty-six miles, over roads and where there were no roads. Six months we were at it. Cement, thousands of bags, millions of bags! They all but broke our backs. Iron and steel and copper. These things we brought, and we piled them here. Machines we would bring in pieces and set together. Two years and a half we worked on that dam, Hilda and I. We moved mountains. We performed mighty deeds, we and the machines that the little mind of man has devised so that his lazy body may rest. We used them all to help the little minds. Two years and a half we labored, we and the machines, and there is the dam.

"Then we could rest a while. A month we rested, while the little stream that trickled down these rocks began to grow. Each rain would see it spreading, and we knew our work was good. Then we built our power house, and the lead for the turbine. We felt no need of haste because the little stream was moving slowly to become a lake. The second summer we thought the sources had dried, but with the autumn came the rains and our stream was a pond. Since then it has always grown.

"We installed our machinery, and at nights I worked in my laboratory. There was no crowd to bother me. Hilda worked with me. In the daytime we strained at great bars of iron and struggled with bolts as did the slaves of the pyramids. But at night all was calm and peaceful, as we worked with simple things that were easy to handle but that could move

mountains as you would brush away that ash from off your sleeve.

"That is all over. We are through now. We are resting. It is all finished, and it is good. I am ready for my greatest work. I am ready to save the world from what I have had to endure. I am ready for the day."

His face was aglow with the light of a great purpose. His eyes blazed and Blandon saw in them the glint of the fanatic. But the man did not see Blandon. His gaze was off over the world he was to save. Blandon struggled to his feet. He too had a vision. In an unsteady voice he asked:

"What day?"

The door opened behind them. Hilda called out:

"Father."

Neither man turned. Still with that light burning in his eyes, Thorsby spoke:

"May the first."

5

BLANDON stared at him, unable to speak. The man did not fit the mental image he had drawn. He was so peaceful, so calm, so poised. Blandon had pictured a fanatic wild of eye, burning with a rage to destroy. This man moved majestically. He was a fanatic, but the most dangerous of them all. His purpose was all-consuming, it left no room for theatrics. In the booming tones of that "May the first" Blandon recognized now the voice which had set the world ablaze with fear. This man, staring off so calmly into space, controlled the world—he held it in those long, strong fingers. A nation was thrashing about in a maelstrom of indecision and terror, because of this man, who seemed so far removed from it all, as he stared across the Tennessee hills on that April morning.

Hilda crossed the porch to her father's side. She laid a hand upon his arm. He looked at her, smiled a trifle, and before Blandon could summon up any one of the myriad words seeking expression, Thorsby turned and entered the house. Blandon started after him, but the weakened ankle failed to bear his unsupported weight, and he managed barely to catch a chair and prevent falling. The girl was at his side, and she helped him to sink back on the bench.

"Oh, did you hurt it?" she asked solicitously.

"No." Blandon was curt. He was staring at her now. Thorsby said that she was his helper, his aid in all that he accomplished. She must have helped him discover this power, she must be aiding him in its use. It was impossible to believe that this girl could ever sanction such madness. She must have read his thoughts.

"Now you understand why we are so far away from the world." Her serious voice was kindly, yet there was no hint of apology. "But you must not think those things your eyes are seeing. We are going to harm no one. We are only going to help."

"Help?" Blandon interrupted. "Harm no one? How about the Congress you will destroy? Are they not to be considered?"

"Nothing but the ending of war is to be considered"—her tone was still kindly—"but we will not destroy Congress."

"So then it was a bluff all along." Blandon heaved a sigh of relief. Hilda inspected him with her level gaze.

"It was not a bluff. Father will do exactly as he said, unless Congress complies with our demands. They will do it, though. If they can not see reason, they will be too afraid of their own skins to hold out."

"You are wrong." Blandon's voice was angry. "You are dead wrong. Congress is going through with it. They are not all cowards, no group of Americans is. They are going

through with it and the President with them. Don't be deceived on that point. Should they be cowards enough to agree, the people would destroy them. You can't bluff them. You can't destroy them. What are you going to do?"

Blandon's seriousness seemed to surprize the girl. She gazed at him earnestly.

"You believe that, don't you?" she asked after a moment.

"Believe it? I *know* it."

"I hope you are wrong, then." She arose to her feet. Like her father, she stood tall and straight, looking out across the valley. "I hope you are wrong," she repeated, "because we are going through with it."

With this statement she left him. Blandon could not collect his thoughts. Everything about him was so foreign to the things he had just learned. The man, calm and poised; the girl, tender as a woman is supposed to be; peaceful hillside and valley asleep in the sunshine; none of this hinted of the terror that was shaking the world. Blandon was dreaming. He was asleep in his tent back there in the little glade, and his subconscious self was on a tour of wild imaginings. A catbird called from a hickory tree down the slope. He heard a horse neigh up the slope behind him. He was not dreaming. It was all real, as real as that solid dam below him, and the towers of spidery steel reaching up in the air with their clusters of wires at the top.

Yet Blandon could not believe it. He could not comprehend a girl so solicitous of a simple pain in his ankle, calmly discussing the destruction of half a thousand men unless her will were obeyed. He could hear her moving about inside the house. A chair scraped on the floor. No doubt she was dusting, arranging the furniture, busy with the multifarious details of woman's mysterious occupation, keeping house, yet five minutes before she had stated, almost matter-of-factly, that she and her father would send the Capitol of their country and the men who guided its destinies back into cosmic dust, unless preposterous orders were obeyed.

Hilda appeared in the door again. Blandon looked at her curiously, trying to read madness in her eyes. There was nothing there of wildness. He caught himself swimming in the blueness of them, the serenity that they held.

"I am afraid you are not going to be able to finish your tour of inspection soon," she said. "We are delighted that you are to be our guest. It grows lonely here sometimes." She was almost wistful. "Father says it will be more than a week before you can move about readily with your ankle. Is there anything at your camp you wish especially? I was going riding this morning, and if you can give me any idea of where you have your tent, I will try to find it and get what you desire."

Blandon's one desire was to talk to her, find out more about this power, their plans, for his mind was awhirl with his discovery. He wanted to convince her how wrong she was, but his thoughts were incoherent with sudden knowledge. And there were things he wanted; more tobacco, clothing, so he told her.

She came back to him about half an hour later, magnificently beautiful in riding breeches and a flaming crimson sweater.

"I am afraid I shall not be back before lunch, so I have prepared some sandwiches. There is milk in the refrigerator. Will you try to make father eat? He is in the room adjoining yours. Do not knock on the door, it is soundproof; there is a bell beside it you may ring. Please do not try to walk. If you do, do not venture near any wires. Remember that, please." Her tone was earnest.

Blandon watched her climb the

steps toward the queer structure on the hill. She turned off before she reached it, and her path carried her out of sight beyond the corner of the house. In a few minutes he heard the clatter of horse's hoofs, followed by a shrill whistle. In about five minutes he caught sight of horse and rider picking their way across the rocky creek bed below the dam. Then she disappeared, and all was still again. His head ached and he could not think. He was possessed of information the world sought and he was unable to plan what to do with it. Avoid the wire, Hilda said. So that was what killed his dog. He must find Thorsby and talk to him.

He hobbled into the house and picked up the sandwiches from the table. He found the solid oaken door and pressed the button beside it. It was a full minute before the door opened.

"Miss Thorsby told me to be sure that you ate some lunch," Blandon explained to Thorsby, who gazed at him abstracted. "Here are some sandwiches." Thorsby took them and nodded his head in thanks. Before Blandon could form one of the questions crowding him, Thorsby closed the door. In the brief moment it was open Blandon could see a radio set. The room was enormous for the size of the house—it must have taken up at least half of it. Even an inexperienced eye could realize it was a laboratory. Coils, vacuum tubes, batteries—these were in sight, but in the brief glimpse given him, Blandon could not make anything of them, except the usual confusion apparent to casual inspection. He started to ring again but dropped his hand. He must think this thing out calmly. Crippled, his head throbbing, he went to his room. He threw himself across the bed to ease the pain in his head and the ache in his ankle. Exhausted nerves refused further strain, and he slept.

It was dark when he awoke refreshed and his pain eased. As he became fully aroused he realized that he had discovered what a whole nation was seeking. He was given the power to save the world. What had he been thinking about, sleeping when he should have been doing something? What could he do alone, crippled as he was? Get back to civilization to find the authorities in order that the plant might be destroyed! What day was this? He counted up, he had lost one day. It must be the seventeenth of April. May first was the time limit set for the government to comply with the demands. This the government would not do, therefore only thirteen days remained. It would require two days for him to get in touch with the authorities, and then there would be only eleven days. Eleven days in which to save the world. He arose hurriedly, and fell back across the bed when his weakened ankle once more gave way. Furious at his carelessness, Blandon arose more carefully. He had forgotten his injury for the moment. It made no difference, there was the horse, he could get that out at night, and move more rapidly.

There were lights in the living room. Hilda was sewing, her hair glowing in the lamplight. Thorsby was reading, chuckling to himself. They did not look the part they were playing. Yet he knew their plans; it was not likely they would let him go willingly. He must proceed cautiously. As he reached the door they both looked up. Hilda jumped to her feet to pull up a comfortable chair.

"I hope you are feeling refreshed," Thorsby said to him. He arose and went to the corner, bringing back a crutch, newly fashioned but finished perfectly. "I made this in the hope it would enable you to move about more easily."

Hilda smiled happily at Blandon as he eased his injured foot to a comfortable position in front of him. Once

more he tried to make himself believe he was dreaming. The solicitude, the peaceful calm of this room alive with the evidence of kindly people inhabiting it made the reality unbelievable. Thorsby had laid down his book. It was *Alice in Wonderland.* Hilda was making doll clothes! She caught his glance.

"I haven't any dolls of my own," she explained. "These are for a little orphan girl in Boston." She put aside her work. "Do you think you could dine now?" she asked as she arose, and without waiting for an answer she left the room, leaving Blandon aware of nothing but admiration for the imposing grace of her.

"Alice can take one a long way from grim reality." Thorsby indicated his book. "She is a symbol to me of us poor humans stumbling along through a world all topsyturvy because we can't see things right side up. Unfortunately, we are not, like Alice, able to wake up and find that it is a dream. Too few dream. The undreamers want everything in perfect order all the time, holding on to the old things because they mistrust the new."

There was no chance for Blandon to interrupt, to question this living exemplar of the topsyturvy world of which he discoursed. Hilda reappeared shortly and announced dinner. Thorsby continued to talk as they ate. Hilda, in a lull, told of her trip and the ease with which she discovered Blandon's camp by following his directions. His things were undisturbed, she said, and she had covered them with a tarpaulin and tightened the guys of his tent. They would be safe for two weeks more. Luxuriating in tobacco, for the first time in two days, Blandon tried to press some on his host. They did not seem to think he was moved by his discovery. He planned to keep them from suspecting it.

"I forgot to smoke once years ago and kept on forgetting, so now I do not want to any more," Thorsby explained. "It makes it much simpler, because I do not know how to grow tobacco. We grow everything else here. This is a self-supporting community, and my work has kept me busy."

"Mr. Thorsby, will you pardon my curiosity, but what are you doing?" Blandon tried to make his question politely casual.

"I am trying to control the flow of matter," his host answered calmly. There was nothing assumed in Blandon's blank expression, which made the inventor go on. "Of course, you know that all matter is fluid?" Finding no dissent, he continued.

"Ten years ago I began my experiments. Ten months ago I succeeded half-way. I can destroy matter. I hope shortly to start to work on the reverse practise. There has been enough of destruction. It is time that we learned to build up. If I may stop destruction, then I have accomplished much." He stopped, and once more he fastened his gaze on distant horizons beyond Blandon's range of vision. Thorsby began again:

"Science is accelerating its momentum in this age as the dropping stone does when it gets nearer the earth. The accumulation of knowledge is bearing fruit with a daily increasing fertility. Years have elapsed since the atom took its place as the unit of matter. Now that we know the electron and its nucleus, the proton, there is a new beginning to our knowledge. That is where I work, Mr. Blandon, with the electron."

"How do you mean, sir?" Blandon realized that a worker of miracles was about to explain them.

"The solar system holds its entity in space by a continuation of the revolution of its units in their orbits. It assumes definite space form. The constant flux, revolution if you will, of the electrons around the proton cre-

ates the atom. Do they revolve in orbits? My answer is yes, and I have given proof of my theory. When I determined this in my tests, I worked to one end—the discovery of what would happen by changing their orbits or halting their revolutions. The force that actuates them, that actuates all matter, is electric, the term we have chosen for the very fluid of life itself. Man thinks he has accomplished much with his devices for the harnessing of this vital fluid, but he is only at the threshold.

"I harnessed it in a new way. As you tune in with your radio set to the broadcasting waves of the air, I finally tuned in to the wave length, the period of revolution of the electron. Your set receives, mine controls. My theory is simple. Knowing the period of the electron, I meet it with an impulse, halt its revolution, halt the system of electrons whose flow makes up the atom, and the atom breaks down. So matter is changed. So life will be changed."

Blandon stared at him as he finished. Here was the man who had changed the world overnight. He dismissed the miracles of research in a few words. "So matter is changed," he said. "So life will be changed." Blandon could see the change, but not as Thorsby saw it. He saw rapine and destruction, the tearing down of a hard-won civilization, where superscience would drive man back to the lowest primitive, where tooth and claw would be the law as in the days when the ice-sheet first left the world. Thorsby gave him no chance to begin his arguments.

"Would you care to see an experiment?" The scientist pushed back his chair and lifted his plate from the table. "You can spare me this plate, daughter?" he asked Hilda humorously. She nodded. "Come with me, and I will show you." Blandon followed him to the laboratory with its heavy oaken door.

It might have been the show room of a shop dealing in radio instruments. Coils, tubes, bulbs, electrical appliances of all descriptions lay on a heavy table which stretched across one side of the room. In one corner was a motor. One wall was covered with transformers, so Blandon judged them to be, though of a new type. At one end of the table was a glistening control board. Wattmeters, ammeters, switches and long, dull-glowing tubes were fastened to it. A few feet away, connected by heavy wires, was a queer grid arrangement. It might have been a miniature copy of the common electric heater, with four coils at its center. The protecting wire cage did not extend to the edges of the reflector bowl, but was supported on four vulcanite posts. The cage itself was a cone, ending in four glistening points.

Thorsby led the way to the switchboard. He placed a small iron stand directly before the miniature heater, so Blandon called it for want of a better name, and about two feet away.

"I will not attempt to explain my system," Thorsby said. "However, it is an amplification of the original Hertzian theory. I will now destroy the things that are on this plate, one at a time, in part, and then the whole. It is a question of intensity, and my force may be directed to any point. Stand behind me, please."

As he talked, Thorsby threw in a switch. The tubes on the control board leaped into a vivid light. There was a slight humming in the transmitter, which Blandon now recognized the heater to be. At its base was a vulcanite handle. Thorsby grasped this.

"A feature of this force is that its range may be determined absolutely. This impulse will not act beyond three feet, therefore the room is safe. Watch!"

(Continued on page 287)

The Isle Of Missing Ships

by Seabury Quinn

A Complete Novelette

"I could feel them standing over me, and a queer, cold feeling tingled between my shoulder blades, where I momentarily expected a knife thrust."

THE *Mevrouw*, Sumatra-bound out of Amsterdam, had dropped the low Holland coast an hour behind when I recognized a familiar figure among the miscellany of Dutch colonials. The little man with the erect, military carriage, trimly waxed mustache and direct, challenging blue eyes was as conspicuous amid the throng of overfleshed planters, traders and petty administrators as a fleur-de-lis growing in the midst of a cabbage patch.

"For the Lord's sake, de Grandin! What are you doing here?" I demanded, seizing him by the hand. "I thought you'd gone back to your microscopes and test tubes when you cleared up the Broussac mystery."

He grinned at me like a blond brother of Mephistopheles as he linked his arm in mine and caught step with me. "*Eh bien,*" he agreed with a nod, "so did I; but those inconsiderate Messieurs Lloyd would not have it so. They must needs send me an urgent message to investigate a suspicion they have at the other end of the earth.

"I did not desire to go. The summer is come and the blackbirds are singing in the trees at St. Cloud. Also, I have much work to do; but they tell me: 'You shall name your own price and no questions shall be asked,' and, *hélas*, the franc is very low on the exchange these days.

"I tell them, 'Ten pounds sterling for each day of my travels and all expenses.' They agree. *Voilà.* I am here."

I looked at him in amazement. "Lloyds? Ten pounds sterling a day?" I echoed. "What in the world——?"

"*La, la!*" he exclaimed. "It is a long story, Friend Trowbridge, and most like a foolish one in the bargain, but, at any rate, the English money is sound. Listen"—he sank his voice to a confidential whisper.—"you know those Messieurs Lloyd, *hein?* They will insure against anything from the result of one of your

American political elections to the loss of a ship in the sea. That last business of theirs is also my business, for the time.

"Of late the English insurers have had many claims to pay—claims on ships which should have been good risks. There was the Dutch Indiaman *Van Damm*, a sound little iron ship of twelve thousand tons displacement. She sail out of Rotterdam for Sumatra, and start home heavy-laden with spices and silks, also with a king's ransom in pearls safely locked in her strong box. Where is she now?" He spread his hands and shrugged expressively. "No one knows. She was never heard of more, and the Lloyds had to make good her value to her owners.

"There was the French steamer *l'Orient*, also dissolved into air, and the British merchantman *Nightingale*, and six other sound ships gone—all gone, with none to say whither, and the estimable Messieurs Lloyd to pay insurance. All within one single year. *Parbleu*, it is too much! The English company pays its losses like a true sportsman, but it also begins to sniff the aroma of the dead fish. They would have me, Jules de Grandin, investigate this business of the monkey and tell them where the missing ships are gone.

"It may be for a year that I search; it may be for only a month, or, perhaps, I spend the time till my hair is as bald as yours, Friend Trowbridge, before I can report. No matter; I receive my ten pounds each day and all incidental expenses. Say now, are not those Messieurs Lloyd gambling more recklessly this time than ever before in their long career?"

"I think they are," I agreed.

"But," he replied with one of his elfish grins, "remember, Trowbridge, my friend, those Messieurs Lloyd were never known to lose money permanently on any transaction. *Morbleu!* Jules de Grandin, as the Americans say, you entertain the hatred for yourself!"

The *Mevrouw* churned and wallowed her broadbeamed way through the cool European ocean, into the summer seas, finally out upon the tropical waters of Polynesia. For five nights the smalt-blue heavens were ablaze with stars; on the sixth evening the air thickened at sunset. By 10 o'clock the ship might have been draped in a pall of black velvet as a teapot is swathed in a cozy, so impenetrable was the darkness. Objects a dozen feet from the porthole lights were all but indistinguishable, at twenty feet they were invisible, and, save for the occasional phosphorescent glow of some tumbling sea denizen, the ocean itself was only an undefined part of the surrounding blackness.

"Eh, but I do not like this," de Grandin muttered as he lighted a rank Sumatra cigar from the ship steward's store and puffed vigorously to set the fire going: "this darkness, it is a time for evil doings, Friend Trowbridge."

He turned to a ship's officer who strode past us toward the bridge. "Is it that we shall have a storm, *Monsieur?*" he asked. "Does the darkness portend a typhoon?"

"No," returned the Dutchman. "Id iss wolcanic dust. Some of dose volcano mountains are in eruption again and scatter steam and ash over a hundred miles. Tomorrow, berhaps, or de nex' day, ve are out of id an' into de zunzhine again."

"Ah," de Grandin bowed acknowledgment of the information, "and does this volcanic darkness frequently come at this latitude and longitude, *Monsieur?*"

"*Ja,*" the other answered, "dese vaters are almost alvays covered; de

chimneys of hell poke up through de ocean hereabouts, *Mijnheer.*"

"*Cordieu!*" de Grandin swore softly to himself. "I think he has spoken truth, Friend Trowbridge. Now if—*Grand Dieu,* see! What is that?"

Some distance off our port bow a brand of yellow fire burned a parabola against the black sky, burst into a shower of sparks high above the horizon and flung a constellation of colored fire-balls into the air. A second flame followed the first, and a third winged upward in the wake of the second. "Rockets," de Grandin announced. "A ship is in distress over there, it would seem."

Bells clanged and jangled as the engine room telegraph sent orders from the bridge; there was a clanking of machinery as the screws churned in opposite directions and the steering mechanism brought the ship's head about toward the distress signals.

"I think we had best be prepared, my friend," de Grandin whispered as he reached upward to the rack above us and detached two kapok swimming jackets from their straps. "Come, slip this over your shoulders, and if you have anything in your cabin you would care to save, get it at once," he advised.

"You're crazy, man," I protested, pushing the life preserver away. "We aren't in any danger. Those lights were at least five miles away, and even if that other ship is fast on a reef our skipper would hear the breakers long before we were near enough to run aground."

"*Nom d'un nom!*" the little Frenchman swore in vexation. "Friend Trowbridge, you are one great zany. Have you no eyes in that so empty head of yours? Did you not observe how those rockets went up?"

"How they went up?" I repeated. "Of course I did; they were fired from the deck—perhaps the bridge—of some ship about five miles away."

"So?" he replied in a sarcastic whisper. "Five miles, you say? And you, a physician, do not know that the human eye sees only about five miles over a plane surface? How, then, if the distressed ship is five miles distant, could those flares have appeared to rise *from a greater height than our own deck?* Had they really been fired from sea-level—even from a masthead, at that distance—they should have appeared to rise across the horizon. As it was, they first became visible at a considerable height."

"Nonsense," I rejoined; "whoever would be setting off rockets in mid-air in this part of the world?"

"Who, indeed?" he answered, gently forcing the swimming coat on me. "That question, *mon ami,* is precisely what those Messieurs Lloyd are paying me ten pounds a day to answer. Hark!"

Distinctly, directly in our path, sounded the muttering roar of waves breaking against rocks.

Clang! The ship's telegraph shrieked the order to reverse, to put about, to the engine room from the bridge. Wheels and chains rattled, voices shouted hoarse orders through the dark, and the ship shivered from stem to stern as the engines struggled hysterically to break our course toward destruction.

Too late! Like a toy boat caught in a sudden wind squall, we lunged forward, gathering speed with each foot we traveled. There was a rending crash like all the crockery in the world being smashed at once, de Grandin and I fell headlong to the deck and shot along the smooth boards like a couple of ball players sliding for second base, and the stout little *Mevrouw* listed suddenly to port, sending us banging against the deck rail.

"Quick, quick, my friend!" de

Grandin shouted. "Over the side and swim for it. I may be wrong, *prie-Dieu* I am, but I fear there will be devil's work here anon. Come!" He lifted himself to his feet, balanced on the rail a moment, then slipped into the purple water that swirled past the doomed ship's side a scant seven feet below us.

I followed, striking out easily toward the quiet water ahead, the kapok jacket keeping me afloat and the rushing water carrying me forward rapidly.

"By George, old fellow, you've been right this far," I congratulated my companion, but he shut me off with a sharp hiss.

"Still, you fool," he admonished savagely. "Keep your silly tongue quiet and kick with your feet. Kick, kick, I tell you! Make as great commotion in the water as possible—*nom de Dieu!* We are lost!"

Faintly luminous with the phosphorescence of tropical sea water, something seeming as large as a submarine boat shot upward from the depths below, headed as straight for my flailing legs as a sharpshooter's bullet for its target.

De Grandin grasped my shoulder and heaved me over in a clumsy back somersault, and at the same time thrust himself as deeply into the water as his swimming coat would permit. For a moment his fiery silhouette mingled with that of the great fish and he seemed striving to embrace the monster, then the larger form sank slowly away, while the little Frenchman rose puffing to the surface.

"*Mordieu!*" he commented, blowing the water from his mouth; "that was a near escape, my friend. One little second more and he would have had your leg in his belly. Lucky for us I knew the pearl divers' trick of slitting those fellows' gills with a knife, and luckier still I thought to bring along a knife to slit him with."

"What was it?" I asked, still bewildered by the performance I had just witnessed. "It looked big enough to be a whale."

He shook his head to clear the water from his eyes as he replied: "It was our friend, *Monsieur le Requin*—the shark. He is always hungry, that one, and such morsels as you would be a choice titbit for his table, my friend."

"A shark!" I answered incredulously. "But it couldn't have been a shark, de Grandin, they have to turn on their backs to bite, and that thing came straight at me."

"*Ah, bah!*" he shot back disgustedly. "What old wives' tale is that you quote? *Le requin* is no more compelled to take his food upside down than you are. I tell you, he would have swallowed your leg up to the elbow if I had not cut his sinful gizzard in two!"

"Good Lord!" I began splashing furiously. "Then we're apt to be devoured any moment!"

"Possibly," he returned calmly, "but not probably. If land is not too far away that fellow's brethren will be too busy eating him to pay attention to such small fry as us. *Grâce à Dieu,* I think I feel the good land beneath our feet even now."

It was true. We were standing armpit-deep on a sloping, sandy beach with the long, gentle swell of the ocean kindly pushing us toward the shore. A dozen steps and we were safely beyond the tide-line, lying face down upon the warm sands and gulping down great mouthfuls of the heavy, sea-scented air. What de Grandin did there in the dark I do not know, but for my part I offered up such unspoken prayers of devout thanksgiving as I had never breathed before.

My devotions were cut short by a

sputtering mixture of French profanity.

"What's up?" I demanded, then fell silent as de Grandin's hand closed on my wrist like a tightened tourniquet.

"Hark, my friend," he commanded. "Look across the water to the ship we left and say whether or no I was wise when I brought us away."

Out across the quiet lagoon inside the reef the form of the stranded *Mevrouw* loomed a half shade darker than the night, her lights, still burning, casting a fitful glow upon the crashing water at the reef and the quiet water beyond. Two, three, four, half a dozen shades gathered alongside her; dark figures, like ants swarming over the carcass of a dead rat, appeared against her lights a moment, and the stabbing flame of a pistol was followed a moment later by the reports of the shots wafted to us across the lagoon. Shouts, cries of terror, screams of women in abject fright followed one another in quick succession for a time, then silence, more ominous than any noise, settled over the water.

Half an hour, perhaps, de Grandin and I stood tense-muscled on the beach, staring toward the ship, waiting expectantly for some sign of renewed life. One by one her porthole lights blinked out; at last she lay in utter darkness.

"It is best we seek shelter in the bush, my friend," de Grandin announced matter-of-factly. "The farther out of sight we get the better will be our health."

"What in heaven's name does it all mean?" I demanded as I turned to follow him.

"Mean?" he echoed impatiently. "It means we have stumbled on as fine a nest of pirates as ever cheated the yardarm. When we reached this island, Friend Trowbridge, I fear we did but step from the soup kettle into the flame. *Mille tonneres*, what a fool you are, Jules de Grandin! You should have demanded fifty pounds sterling a day from those Messieurs Lloyd! Come, Friend Trowbridge, let us seek shelter. Right away, at once, immediately."

The sloping beach gave way to a line of boulders a hundred yards inland, and these, in turn, marked the beginning of a steady rise in the land, its lower portion overgrown with bushes, loftier growth supplanting the underbrush as we stumbled upward over the rocks.

When we had traversed several hundred rods and knocked nearly all the skin from our legs against unexpectedly projecting stones, de Grandin called a halt in the midst of a copse of wide-leafed trees. "We may as well rest here as elsewhere," he suggested philosophically. "The pack will scarcely hunt again tonight."

I was too sleepy and exhausted to ask what he meant. The last hour's events had been as full of surprizes to me as a traveling carnival is for a farmhand.

It might have been half an hour later, or only five minutes, judging by my feelings, that I was roused by the roar of a muffled explosion, followed at short intervals by two more detonations. "*Mordieu!*" I heard de Grandin exclaim. "Up, Friend Trowbridge. Rise and see!" He shook me roughly by the shoulder, and half dragged me to an opening in the trees. Out across the lagoon I saw the hulk of the *Mevrouw* falling apart and sliding into the water like a mud bank attacked by a summer flood, and round her the green waters boiled and seethed as though the entire reef had suddenly gone white-hot. Across the lagoon, wave after swelling wave raced and tumbled, beating on the glittering sands of the beach in a furious surf.

"Why——" I began, but he an-

swered my question before I could form it.

"Dynamite!" he exclaimed. "Last night, or early this morning, they looted her, now they dismantle the remains with high explosives; it would not do to let her stand there as a sign-post of warning for other craft. *Pardieu!* They have system, these ones. Captain Kidd and Blackbeard, they were but freshmen in crime's college, Friend Trowbridge. We deal with postgraduates here. Ah"—his small, womanishly slender hand caught me by the arm—"observe, if you please; what is that on the sands below?"

Following his pointing finger with my eyes, I made out, beyond a jutting ledge of rocks, the rising spiral of a column of wood smoke. "Why," I exclaimed delightedly, "some of the people from the ship escaped, after all! They got to shore and built a fire. Come on, let's join them. Hello, down here; hello, hello! You——"

"Fool!" he cried in a suppressed shout, clapping his hand over my mouth. "Would you ruin us altogether, completely, entirely? *Le bon Dieu* grant your ass's bray was not heard, or, if heard, was disregarded!"

"But," I protested, "those people probably have food, de Grandin, and we haven't a single thing to eat. We ought to join them and plan our escape."

He looked at me as a school teacher might regard an unusually backward pupil. "They have food, no doubt," he admitted, "but what sort of food, can you answer me that? Suppose—*nom d'un moineau, regardez vous!*"

As if in answer to my hail, a pair of the most villainous-looking Papuans I had ever beheld came walking around the rocky screen beyond which the smoke rose, looked undecidedly toward the heights where we hid, then turned back whence they had come. A moment later they reappeared, each carrying a broad-bladed spear, and began climbing over the rocks in our direction.

"Shall we go to meet them?" I asked dubiously. Those spears looked none too reassuring to me.

"*Mais non!*" de Grandin answered decidedly. "They may be friendly; but I distrust everything on this accurst island. We would better seek shelter and observe."

"But they might give us something to eat," I urged. "The whole world is pretty well civilized now, it isn't as if we were back in Captain Cook's day."

"Nevertheless," he returned as he wriggled under a clump of bushes, "we shall watch first and ask questions later."

I crawled beside him and squatted, awaiting the savages' approach.

But I had forgotten that men who live in primitive surroundings have talents unknown to their civilized brethren. While they were still far enough away to make it impossible for us to hear the words they exchanged as they walked, the two Papuans halted, looked speculatively at the copse where we hid, and raised their spears menacingly.

"*Ciel!*" de Grandin muttered. "We are discovered." He seized the stalk of one of the sheltering plants and shook it gently.

The response was instant. A spear whizzed past my ear, missing my head by an uncomfortably small fraction of an inch, and the savages began clambering rapidly toward us, one with his spear poised for a throw, the other drawing a murderous knife from the girdle which constituted his sole article of clothing.

"*Parbleu!*" de Grandin whispered fiercely. "Play dead, my friend. Fall out from the bush and lie as though his spear had killed you." He gave me a sudden push which sent me reeling into the open.

I fell flat to the ground, acting the part of a dead man as realistically as possible and hoping desperately that the savages would not decide to throw a second spear to make sure of their kill.

Though my eyes were closed, I could feel them standing over me, and a queer, cold feeling tingled between my shoulder blades, where I momentarily expected a knife thrust.

Half opening one eye, I saw the brown, naked shins of one of the Papuans beside my head, and was wondering whether I could seize him by the ankles and drag him down before he could stab me, when the legs beside my face suddenly swayed drunkenly, like tree trunks in a storm, and a heavy weight fell crashing upon my back.

Startled out of my sham death by the blow, I raised myself in time to see de Grandin in a death grapple with one of the savages. The other one lay across me, the spear he had flung at us a few minutes before protruding from his back directly beneath his left shoulder blade.

"*À moi,* Friend Trowbridge!" the little Frenchman called. "Quick, or we are lost."

I tumbled the dead Papuan unceremoniously to the ground and grappled with de Grandin's antagonist just as he was about to strike his dirk into my companion's side.

"*Bien, très bien!*" the Frenchman panted as he thrust his knife forward, sinking the blade hilt-deep into the savage's left armpit. "Very good, indeed, Friend Trowbridge. I have not hurled the javelin since I was a boy at school, and I strongly misdoubted my ability to kill that one with a single throw from my ambush, but, happily, my hand has not lost its cunning. *Voilà,* we have a perfect score to our credit! Come, let us bury them."

"But was it necessary to kill the poor fellows?" I asked as I helped him scrape a grave with one of his victims' knives. "Mightn't we have made them understand we meant them no harm?"

"Friend Trowbridge," he answered between puffs of exertion as he dragged one of the naked bodies into the shallow trench we had dug, "never, I fear me, will you learn the sense of the goose. With fellows such as these, even as with the shark last night, we take necessary steps for our own protection first.

"This interment which we make now, think you it is for tenderness of these *canaille? Ah, non.* We bury them that their friends find them not if they come searching, and that the buzzards come not flapping this way to warn the others of what we have done. Good, they are buried. Take up that one's spear and come with me. I would investigate that fire which they have made."

We approached the heights overlooking the fire cautiously, taking care to remain unseen by any possible scout sent out by the main party of natives. It was more than an hour before we maneuvered to a safe observation post. As we crawled over the last ridge of rock obstructing our view I went deathly sick at my stomach and would have fallen down the steep hill, had not de Grandin thrown his arm about me.

Squatting around a blazing bonfire in a circle, like wolves about the stag they have run to earth, were perhaps two dozen naked savages, and, bound upright to a stake fixed in the sand, was a white man, lolling forward against the restraining cords with a horrible limpness. Before him stood two burly Papuans, the war clubs in their hands, red as blood at the tips, telling the devil's work they had just completed. It *was* blood on the clubs. The brown fiends had beaten their helpless captive's head in, and even

now one of them was cutting the cords that held his body to the stake.

But beyond the dead man was a second stake, and, as I looked at this, every drop of blood in my body seemed turned to liquid fire, for, lashed to it, mercifully unconscious, but still alive, was a white woman whom I recognized as the wife of a Dutch planter going out from Holland to join her husband in Sumatra.

"Good God, man!" I cried. "That's a woman; a white woman. We can't let those devils kill *her!*"

"Softly, my friend," de Grandin cautioned, pressing me back, for I would have risen and charged pell-mell down the hill. "We are two, they are more than a score; what would it avail us, or that poor woman, were we to rush down and be killed?"

I turned on him in amazed fury. "You call yourself a Frenchman," I taunted, "yet you haven't chivalry enough to attempt a rescue? A fine Frenchman you are!"

"Chivalry is well—in its place," he admitted, "but no Frenchman is so foolish as to spend his life where there is nothing to be bought with it. Would it help her if we, too, were destroyed, or, which is worse, captured and eaten also? You know it would not, my friend. Do we, as physicians, seek to throw away our lives when we find a patient hopelessly sick with phthisis? But no, we live that we may fight the disease in others—that we may destroy the germs of the malady. So let it be in this case. Save that poor one we can not; but take vengeance on her slayers we can and will. I, Jules de Grandin, swear it. Ha, she has it!"

Even as he spoke one of the cannibal butchers struck the unconscious woman over the head with his club. A stain of red appeared against the pale yellow of her hair, and the poor creature shuddered convulsively, then hung passive and flaccid against her bonds once more.

"*Par le sang du diable,*" de Grandin gritted between his teeth, "if it so be that the good God lets me live, I swear to make those *sales bouchers* die one hundred deaths apiece for every hair in that so pitiful woman's head!"

He turned away from the horrid sight below us and began to ascend the hill. "Come away, Friend Trowbridge," he urged. "It is not good that we should look upon a woman's body served as meat. *Pardieu,* almost I wish I had followed your so crazy advice and attempted a rescue; we should have killed some of them so! No matter, as it is, we shall kill all of them, or may those Messieurs Lloyd pay me not one penny."

FEELING secure against discovery by the savages, as they were too engrossed in their orgy to look for other victims, we made our way to the peak which towered like a truncated cone at the center of the island.

From our station at the summit we could see the ocean in all directions and get an accurate idea of our surroundings. Apparently, the islet was the merest point of land on the face of the sea—probably only the apex of a submarine volcano. It was roughly oval in shape, extending for a possible five miles in length by two-and-a-quarter miles at its greatest width, and rising out of the ocean with a mountainous steepness, the widest part of the beach at the water-line being not more than three or four hundred feet. On every side, and often in series of three or four, extended reefs and points of rock (no doubt the lesser peaks of the mountain whose unsubmerged top constituted the island) so that no craft larger than a whaleboat could hope to come within half a mile of the land without having its bottom torn out by the hidden or semi-submerged crags.

"Nom d'un petit bonhomme!" de Grandin commented. "This is an ideal place for its purpose, *c'est certain.* Ah, see!"—he drew me to a ridge of rock which ran like a rampart across the well-defined path by which we had ascended. Fastened to the stone by bolts were three sheet-iron troughs, each pointing skyward at an angle of some fifty degrees, and each much blackened by smoke stains. "Do you see?" he asked. "These are for firing rockets—observe the powder burns on them. And here"—his voice rose to an excited pitch and he fairly danced in eagerness—"see what is before us!"

Up the path, almost at the summit of the peak, and about twenty-five feet apart, stood two poles, each some twelve feet in height and fitted with a pulley and lanyard. As we neared them we saw that a lantern with a green globe rested at the base of the right-hand stake, while a red-globed lamp was secured to the rope of the left post. "Ah, clever, clever," de Grandin muttered, staring from one pole to the other. "Observe, my friend. At night the lamps can be lit and hoisted to the tops of these masts, then gently raised and lowered. Viewed at a distance against the black background of this mountain they will simulate a ship's lights to the life. The unfortunate mariner making for them will find his ship fast on these rocks while the lights are still a mile or more away, and—too well we know what happens then. Let us see what more there is, eh?"

Rounding the peak we found ourselves looking down upon the thatched beehive-roofs of a native village, before which a dozen long Papuan canoes were beached on the narrow strip of sand. "Ah," de Grandin inspected the cluster of huts, "it is there the butchers dwell, eh? That will be a good spot for us to avoid, my friend. Now to find the residence of what you Americans call the master mind. Do you see aught resembling a European dwelling, Friend Trowbridge?"

I searched the greenery below us, but nowhere could I descry a roof. "No," I answered after a second inspection, "there's nothing like a white man's house down there; but how do you know there's a white man here, anyway?"

"Ho, ho," he laughed, "how does the rat know the house contains a cat when he hears it mew? Think you those *sacré* eaters of men would know enough to set up such devil's machinery as this, or that they would take care to dynamite the wreck of a ship after looting it? No, no, my friend, this is white man's work, and very bad work it is, too. Let us explore."

Treading warily, we descended the smooth path leading to the rocket-troughs, looking sharply from left to right in search of anything resembling a white man's house. Several hundred feet down the mountain the path forked abruptly, one branch leading toward the Papuan village, the other running to a narrow strip of beach bordering an inlet between two precipitous rock walls. I stared and stared again, hardly able to believe my eyes, for, drawn up on the sand and made fast by a rope to a ringbolt in the rock was a trim little motor-boat, flat-bottomed for navigating the rock-strewn waters in safety, broad-beamed for mastering the heavy ocean swells, and fitted with a comfortable, roofed-over cabin. Forward, on the little deck above her sharp clipper bow, was an efficient-looking Lewis gun mounted on a swivel, and a similar piece of ordnance poked its aggressive nose out of the engine cockpit at the stern.

"Par la barbe d'un bouc vert," de Grandin swore delightedly, "but this is marvelous, this is magnificent, this is superb! Come, Friend Trow-

bridge, let us take advantage of this miracle; let us leave this hell-hole of an island right away, immediately, at once. *Par*——" The exclamation died, half uttered, and he stared past me with the expression of a superstitious man suddenly face to face with a sheeted specter.

"SURELY, gentlemen," said a suave voice behind me, "you are not going to leave without permitting me to offer you some slight hospitality? That would be ungenerous."

I turned as though stung by a wasp and looked into the smiling eyes of a dark-skinned young man, perhaps thirty years of age. From the top of his spotless *topi* to the tips of his highly polished tan riding boots he was a perfect model of the well-dressed European in the tropics. Not a stain of dust or travel showed on his spruce white drill jacket or modishly cut riding breeches, and as he waved his silver-mounted riding crop in greeting, I saw his slender hands were carefully manicured, the nails cut rather long and stained a vivid pink before being polished to the brightness of mother-of-pearl.

De Grandin laid his hand upon the knife at his belt, but before he could draw it, a couple of beetle-browed Malays in khaki jackets and *sarongs* stepped from the bushes bordering the path and leveled a pair of businesslike Mauser rifles at us. "I wouldn't," the young man warned in a blasé drawl, "I really wouldn't, if I were you. These fellows are both dead shots, and could put enough lead in you to sink you forty fathoms down before you could get the knife out of its sheath, much less into me. Do you mind, really?" He held out his hand for the weapon. "Thank you, that is much better"—he tossed the blade into the water of the inlet with a careless gesture;—"really, you know, the most frightfully messy accidents are apt to happen with those things."

De Grandin and I eyed him in speechless amazement, but he continued as though our meeting were the most conventional thing imaginable:

"Mr. Trowbridge—pardon my assumption, but I heard your name called a moment ago—will you be good enough to favor me with an introduction to your friend?"

"I am Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, of Harrisonville, New Jersey," I replied, wondering, meanwhile, if I were in the midst of some crazy dream, "and this is Dr. Jules de Grandin, of Paris."

"So good of you," the other acknowledged with a smile. "I fear I must be less frank than you for the nonce and remain veiled in anonymity. However, one really must have some sort of designation, mustn't one? So suppose you know me for the present as Goonong Besar. Savage, unchristian-sounding sort of name, I'll admit, but more convenient than calling, 'hey, you!' or simply whistling when you wish to attract my attention. Eh, what? And now"—he made a slight bow,—"if you will be so kind as to step into my humble burrow in the earth——. Yes, that is it, the doorway right before you."

Still under the menacing aim of the Malays' rifles, de Grandin and I walked through the cleft in the rock, traversed a low, narrow passage, darker than a windowless cellar, made a sharp turn to the left, and halted abruptly, blinking our eyes in astonishment.

Before us, seeming to run into infinity, was a wide, long apartment paved with alternate squares of black and white marble, colonnaded down each side with double rows of white-marble pillars and topped with a vaulted ceiling of burnished copper plates. Down the center of the cor-

ridor, at intervals of about twenty feet, five silver oil lamps with globes of finely cut crystal hung from the polished ceiling, making the entire room almost as bright as equatorial noon.

"Not half bad, eh?" our host remarked as he viewed our astonishment with amusement. "This is only the vestibule, gentlemen; you really have no idea of the wonders of this house under the water. For instance, would either of you care to retrace your steps? See if you can find the door you came in."

We swung about, like soldiers at the command of execution, staring straight at the point where the entranceway should have been. A slab of marble, firm and solid as any composing the walls of the room, to all appearances, met our gaze; there was neither sign nor remote evidence of any door or doorway before us.

Goonong Besar chuckled delightedly and gave an order to one of his attendants in the harsh, guttural language of Malaya. "If you will look behind you, gentlemen," he resumed, again addressing us, "you will find another surprize."

We wheeled about and almost bumped into a pair of grinning Malay lads who stood at our elbows.

"These boys will show you to your rooms," Goonong Besar announced. "Kindly follow them. It will be useless to attempt conversation, for they understand no language but their native speech, and as for replying, unfortunately, they lack the benefits of a liberal education and can not write, while——" he shot a quick order to the youths, who immediately opened their mouths as though yawning. Both de Grandin and I gave vent to exclamations of horror. The boys' mouths gaped emptily. Both had had their tongues cut off at the roots.

"You see," Goonong went on in the same musical, slightly bored voice, "these chaps can't be a bit of use to you as gossips, they really can't.

"I think I can furnish you with dinner clothes, Dr. de Grandin, but" — he smiled apologetically — "I'm afraid you, Dr. Trowbridge, are a little too—er—corpulent to be able to wear any garments made for me. So sorry! However, no doubt we can trick you out in a suit of whites. Captain Van Thun—er, that is, I'm sure you can be accommodated from our stores. Yes.

"Now, if you will follow the guides, please"—he broke off on a slightly interrogative note and bowed with gentle courtesy toward each of us in turn,—"you will excuse me for a short time, I'm sure."

Before we could answer, he signaled his two attendants, and the three of them stepped behind one of the marble columns. We heard a subdued click, as of two pieces of stone coming lightly together.

"But, *Monsieur*, this is incredible, this is monstrous!" de Grandin began, striding forward. "You shall explain, I demand——. *Cordieu*, he is gone!"

He was. As though the wall had faded before his approach, or his own body had dissolved into ether, Goonong Besar had vanished. We were alone in the brilliantly-lighted corridor with our tongueless attendants.

NODDING and grinning, the lads signaled us to follow them down the room. One of them ran a few paces ahead and parted a pair of silken curtains, disclosing a narrow doorway through which only one could go at a time. Obeying the lad's gestures, I stepped through the opening, followed by de Grandin and our dumb guides.

The lad who had held aside the curtains for us ran ahead a few paces and gave a strange, eery cry. We looked sharply at him, wondering

what the utterance portended, and from behind us sounded the thud of stone on stone. Turning, we saw the second Malay grinning broadly at us from the place where the doorway had been. I say "had been" advisedly, for, where the narrow arched door had pierced the thick wall a moment before, was now a solid row of upright marble slabs, no joint or crack showing which portion of the wall was solid stone and which cunningly disguised door.

"Sang du diable!" de Grandin muttered. "But I do not like this place. It reminds me of that grim fortress of the Inquisition at Toledo where the good fathers, dressed as demons, could appear and disappear at will through seeming solid walls and frighten the wits out of and the true faith into superstitious heretics."

I suppressed a shudder with difficulty. This underground house of secret doors was too reminiscent of other practises of the Spanish Inquisition besides the harmless mummery of the monks for my peace of mind.

"Eh bien," de Grandin shrugged, "now we are here we may as well make the best of it. Lead on, *diablotins"*—he turned to our dark-skinned guides,—"we follow."

We were standing in a long, straight passage, smooth-walled with panels of polished marble, and, like the larger apartment, tiled with alternate squares of black and white. No doorways led off the aisle, but other corridors crossed it at right angles at intervals of thirty to thirty-five feet. Like the larger room, the passage was lighted by oil lamps swung from the ceiling.

Following our guides, we turned to the right down a passageway the exact duplicate of the first, entered a third corridor, and, after walking a considerable distance, made another turn and stopped before a narrow curtained archway. Through this we entered a large square room, windowless, but well lighted by lamps and furnished with two bedsteads of bamboo having strong China matting on them in lieu of springs or mattress. A low bamboo dressing table, fitted with a mirror of polished metal, and several reed chairs constituted the residue of the furniture.

One of the boys signed to us to remove our clothes, while the other ran out, returning almost immediately dragging two sheet-iron bath tubs after him. Placing these in the center of the room he left us again, and reappeared in a few minutes with a wheeled contrivance something like a child's express wagon in which stood six large earthen jars, four containing warm water, the other two cold.

We stepped into the tubs and the lads proceeded to rub us down with an oily liquid, strongly perfumed with sandalwood and very soothing to feel. When this had been well worked into our skins the lads poured the contents of the warm-water jars over us, splashing us thoroughly from hair to feet, then sluiced us off with a five-gallon douche of almost ice-cold water. Towels of coarse native linen were unfolded, and in less than five minutes we were as thoroughly cleansed, dried and invigorated as any patron of a Turkish bath at home.

I felt rather dubious when my personal attendant produced a clumsy native razor and motioned me to be seated in one of the cane chairs, but the lad proved a skilful barber, light and deft of touch and absolutely speechless—a great improvement upon the loquacious American tonsorialist, I thought.

Dinner clothes and a suit of carefully laundered white drill, all scented with the pungent, pleasing odor of clove husks, were brought in on wicker trays, and as we put the finishing touches on our toilet one of

the lads produced a small casket of polished cedar in which reposed a layer of long, black cigars, the sort which retail for a dollar apiece in Havana.

"Nom d'un petit bonhomme!" de Grandin exploded as he exhaled a lungful of the fragrant smoke; "this is marvelous; it is magnificent; it is superb—but I like it not, Friend Trowbridge."

"Bosh," I responded, puffing in placid content, "you're afraid of your shadow, de Grandin! Why, man, this is wonderful—think where we were this morning, shipwrecked, pursued by man-eaters, with starvation as the least of our perils, and look at us now, both dressed in clean clothes, with every attention and convenience we could have at home, and safe, man, safe."

"Safe?" he answered dubiously. "'Safe,' do you say? Did you apprehend, my friend, how our host, that so mysterious Monsieur Goonong, almost spoke of Captain Van Thun when the question of clothing you came up?"

"Why, now you speak of it, I do remember how he seemed about to say something about Captain Something-or-Other, and apparently thought better of it," I agreed. "But what's that to do with us?"

The little Frenchman came close to me and sank his voice to a scarcely audible whisper: "Captain Franz Van Thun," he breathed, "was master of the Dutch Indiaman *Van Damm*, which sailed from Rotterdam to Sumatra, and was lost, as far as known, *with all on board*, on her homeward voyage."

"But—" I protested.

"Sh-s-sh!" he cut me off. "Those servant boys are beckoning; come, we are wanted elsewhere."

I looked up at the two mutes, and shuddered at sight of the leering grins on their faces.

The lads led us through another bewildering series of corridors till our sense of location was completely obfuscated, finally paused, one on each side of an archway, and, bowing deeply, signaled us to enter.

We strode into a long, marble-tiled room which, unlike every other apartment in the queer house, was not brilliantly lighted. This room's sole illumination was furnished by the glow of fourteen wax candles set in two seven-branched silver candelabra which stood at opposite ends of a polished mahogany table of purest Sheraton design, its waxed surface giving back reflections of crystal and silver dinner service fit for the table of a king.

"Ah, gentlemen," Goonong Besar, arrayed in immaculate evening clothes, greeted us from the farther end of the room, "I hope you have brought good appetites with you. I'm fairly ravenous, for my part. Will you join me?"

The same Malay servitors who had accompanied him at our meeting stood behind him now, their semi-military khaki jackets and *sarongs* exchanged for costumes of freshly ironed white linen and their rifles replaced by a pair of large-caliber Lüger pistols which each wore conspicuously tucked in his scarlet silk cummerbund.

"Sorry I can't offer you a cocktail," our host apologized as we seated ourselves, "but ice is not among the improvements available in my modest little ménage, unfortunately. However, we find the sea caves do quite well as refrigerators, and I think you'll find this chilled wine really acceptable as a substitute. Ah"—he looked diffidently from one of us to the other, finally fixing his gaze on me,—"will you be good enough to ask the blessing, Dr. Trowbridge? You look as if you might be experienced in that line."

Startled, but greatly reassured by

the request, I bowed my head and repeated the customary formula, almost springing from my chair with amazement as I opened my eyes at the prayer's end. While de Grandin and I had bent above the table during grace, the servants had pulled back the rich *batik* with which the wall facing us was draped, revealing a series of heavy plate glass panels against which the ocean's green waters pressed. We were looking directly on to the sea bottom.

"Jolly clever idea, what?" Goonong Besar inquired, smiling at our surprized faces. "Thought it all up myself; like to see the little finny fellows swim past, you know. Had a beastly hard time getting workmen to do the job for me, too; but all sorts of unbelievable persons trickle into these islands from time to time—architects gone *ga-ga* with drink, skilled artizans in all the trades and what-not,—I finally managed to collect the men I wanted."

"But, *Monsieur*, the expense," de Grandin protested with typical Gallic logic, "it must have been prodigious!"

"Oh, no," the young man answered negligently. "I had to feed the beggars, of course, but most of 'em were habituated to native food, and that's not very expensive."

"But their salaries," de Grandin persisted; "why, *Monsieur*, this house is a work of genius, a marvel of engineering; even drink-ruined architects and engineers capable of producing such a place as this would demand fabulous fees for their services—and the laborers, the men who cut and polished the marble here, they must have been numerous as an army; their wages would be ruinous."

"Most of the marble was salvaged from deserted Dutch colonial palaces," Goonong Besar replied. "You know, Holland built a mighty empire in these islands a century or so ago, and her planters lived in palaces fit for kings. When the empire crumbled the planters left, and he who cared to might help himself to their houses, wholly or in part. As for wages"—he waved a jeweled hand carelessly—"I am rich, but the wages made no great inroads on my fortune. Do you remember your medieval history, Dr. de Grandin?"

"Eh? But certainly," the Frenchman responded, "but——"

"Don't you recall, then, the precaution the nobles, ecclesiastical as well as temporal, took to insure the secrecy of their castle or cathedral plans?" He paused, smiling quizzically at de Grandin.

"*Parbleu!* But you would not; you could not, you would not dare!" the Frenchman almost shouted, half rising from his chair and staring at our host as though a mad dog sat in his place.

"Nonsense, of course I would—and did," the other replied good-humoredly. "Why not? The men were bits of human flotsam, not worth salvaging. And who was to know? Dead men are notoriously uncommunicative, you know. Proverbially so, in fact."

"But, you tell this to me?" de Grandin looked at him incredulously.

Our host's face went perfectly expressionless as he stared directly at de Grandin for a period while one might count five slowly, then his dark, rather sullen face lighted with a smile. "May I offer you some more wine, my dear doctor?" he asked.

I looked alternately at my companions in wonderment. Goonong Besar had made some sinister implication which de Grandin had been quick to comprehend, I knew, and their subsequent conversation concerning dead men telling no tales contained a thinly veiled threat; but try as I would I could not find the key to their enigmatic talk. "Medieval

castles and cathedrals? Dead men tell no tales?" I repeated to myself. What did it all mean?

Goonong Besar broke in on my thought: "May I offer you a bit more of this white meat, Dr. Trowbridge?" he asked courteously. "Really, we find this white meat" (the words were ever so slightly emphasized) "most delicious. So tender and well flavored, you know. Do you like it?"

"Very much, thank you," I replied. "It's quite different from anything I've ever tasted. In a way it reminds me of delicate young pork, yet it's different, too. Is it peculiar to the islands, Mr. Goonong?"

"Well—er"—he smiled slightly as he cut a thin slice of the delicious roast and placed it on my plate,—"I wouldn't say it is peculiar to our islands, though we have an unusual way of preparing it in this house. The natives hereabouts refer to the animal from which it comes as 'long pig'—really a disgusting sort of beast while living; but quite satisfactory when killed and properly cooked. May I serve you again, Dr. de Grandin?" He turned toward the Frenchman with a smile.

I sat suddenly upright in utter, dumfounded amazement as I beheld de Grandin's face. He was leaning forward in his chair, his fierce little blue eyes very round and almost protruding from his head, his weather-tanned cheeks gone the color of putty as he stared at our host like a subject regarding a professional hypnotist. *"Dieu, grand Dieu!"* he ejaculated in a choking whisper. "'Long pig,' did you say? *Sang de St. Denis!* And I have eaten it!"

"My dear chap, are you ill?" I cried, leaping from my chair and hastening to his side. "Has your dinner disagreed with you?"

"Non, non!" he waved me away, still speaking in that choking whisper. "Sit down, Friend Trowbridge, sit down; but *par l'amour de Dieu,* I beseech you, eat no more of that accurst meat, at least not tonight."

"Oh, my dear sir!" Goonong Besar protested mildly. "You have spoiled Dr. Trowbridge's appetite, and he was enjoying this delicious white meat so much, too. This is really too bad, you know. Really, it is!"

He frowned at the silver meat platter before him a moment, then signaled one of his attendants to take it away, adding a quick command in Malayan as he did so.

"Perhaps a little entertainment will help us forget this unfortunate *contretemps,"* he suggested. "I have sent for Miriam. You will like her, I fancy. I have great hopes for her; she has the makings of a really accomplished *artiste,* I think."

The servant who had taken away the meat returned and whispered something in our host's ear. As he listened, Goonong Besar's thin, well-bred face took on such an expression of fury as I had never before seen displayed by a human being. "What?" he shouted, forgetting, apparently, that the Malay did not understand English. "I'll see about this—we'll soon see who says 'must' and 'shall' in this house."

He turned to us with a perfunctory bow as he rose. "Excuse me, please," he begged. "A slight misunderstanding has arisen, and I must straighten it out. I shan't keep you waiting long, I hope; but if you wish anything while I am gone, Hussein"—he indicated the Malay who stood statue-still behind his chair—"will attend your wants. He speaks no English, but you can make him understand by signs, I think."

"Quick, de Grandin, tell me before he comes back," I besought as Goonong, accompanied by one of the Malays, left the room.

"Eh?" replied the Frenchman.

looking up from an absorbed contemplation of the tableware before him. "What is it you would know, my friend?"

"What was all that word-juggling about medieval builders and dead men telling no tales?" I demanded.

"Oh, that?" he answered with a look of relief. "Why, do you not know that when a great lord of the Middle Ages commissioned an architect to build a castle for him it was almost tantamount to a death sentence? The architect, the master builders, even the principal workmen, were usually done to death when the building was finished in order that they might not divulge its secret passages and hidden defenses to an enemy, or duplicate the design for some rival noble."

"Why—why, then, Goonong Besar meant he killed the men who built this submarine house for him!" I ejaculated, horror-stricken.

"Precisely," de Grandin answered, "but, bad as that may be, we have a more personal interest in the matter. Did you notice him when I showed surprize he should confess his guilt to us?"

"Good heavens, yes!" I answered. "He meant——"

"That, though still breathing, we are, to all intents, dead men," de Grandin supplied.

"And that talk of 'white meat,' and 'long pig'?" I asked.

He drew a shuddering breath, as though the marble-lined cavern had suddenly gone icy-cold. "Trowbridge, my friend," he answered in a low, earnest whisper, "you must know this thing; but you must control yourself, too. Not by word or sign must you betray your knowledge. Throughout these devil-ridden islands, wherever the brown fiends who are their natives eat men, they refer to the cannibal feast as a meal of long pig. That so unfortunate man we saw dead at the stake this morning, and that pitiful Dutch woman we saw clubbed to death—they, my friend, were 'long pigs.' That was the *white meat* this devil out of lowest hell set before us this night. That is the food we have eaten at this accurst table!"

"My God!" I half rose from my chair, then sank back, overcome with nausea. "Did we—do you suppose—was it *her* flesh——?"

"*S-s-sh!*" he warned sharply. "Silence, my friend; control yourself. Do not let him see you know. He is coming!"

As though de Grandin's words had been a theatrical cue for his entrance, Goonong Besar stepped through the silken portières at the doorway beyond the table, a pleased smile on his swarthy face. "So sorry to keep you waiting," he apologized. "The trouble is all adjusted now, and we can proceed with our entertainment. Miriam is a little diffident before strangers, but I—er—persuaded her to oblige us." He turned toward the door through which he had entered and waved his hand to someone behind the curtains.

Three Malays, one a woman bent with age and hideously wrinkled, the other two vacant-faced youths, came through the doorway at his gesture. The woman, bearing a section of bamboo fitted with drumheads of rawhide at each end, led the way, the first boy rested his hand on her shoulder, and the second lad, in turn, held tightly to his companion's jacket. A second glance told us the reason for this procedure. The woman, though aged almost to the point of paralysis, possessed a single malignant, blood-shot eye; both boys were sightless, their scarred and sunken eyelids telling mutely of eyeballs gouged from their faces by unskilled hands which had torn the surround-

ing tissues as they ripped the optics from the quivering flesh.

"*Ha-room; ha-room!*" cried the old crone in a cracked treble, and the two blind boys seated themselves cross-legged on the marble floor. One of them raised a reed pipe to his lips, the other rested a sort of zither upon his knees, and each began trying his instrument tentatively, producing a sound approximating the complaints of a tom-cat suffering with cholera morbus.

"*Ha-room; ha-room!*" the hag cried again, and commenced beating a quick rhythm on her drum, using her fingertips and the heels of her hands alternately for drumsticks. "*Tauk*-auk-a — *tauk*-auk-a — *tauk*-auk-a!" the drum-beats boomed hollowly, the first stroke heavily accented, the second and third following in such quick succession that they seemed almost indivisible parts of one continuous thrumming.

Now the pipe and zither took up the tribrach tune, and a surge of fantastic music swirled and eddied through the marble-walled apartment. It was unlike anything I had ever heard, a repetitious, insistent, whining chant of tortured instruments, an air that pleaded with the hearers' evil nature to overthrow restraint and give the beast within him freedom, a harmony that drugged the senses like opium or the extract of the cola-nut. The music raced and soared, faster, shriller and higher, the painted-silk curtains swung apart and a girl glided out upon the tessellated pavement.

She was young—sixteen, or seventeen at the most—and the sinuous, lithe grace of her movements was as much due to healthy and perfectly co-ordinated muscles as to training. The customary *sarong* of the islands encased her nether limbs, but, instead of the native woman's jacket, her *sarong* was carried up beyond the gold six-inch-wide belt about her waist and tightly wrapped about her bosom so that it formed a single comprehensive garment covering her from armpits to ankles. Save for a chaplet of blazing cabochon rubies about her slender throat, her neck and shoulders were bare, but ornaments in the form of flexible golden snakes with emerald eyes twined up each arm from elbow to shoulder, and bangles of pure, soft gold, hung with triple rows of tiny hawk-bells, circled her wrists. Other bangles, products of the finest goldsmiths of India, jangled about her white ankles above the pearl-encrusted slippers of amethyst velvet, while the diamond aigret fastened comb-fashion in her sleekly parted black hair was worth a king's ransom. Fit to ransom a monarch, too, was the superb blue-white diamond of her nose-stud, fixed in her left nostril, and the rope of pearls which circled her waist and hung swaying to the very hem of her *sarong* of Philippine pineapple gauze was fit to buy the Peacock Throne of the Grand Mogul himself.

Despite the lavishly applied cosmetics, the antimony which darkened her eyelids to the color of purple grape skins, the cochineal which dyed her lips and cheeks a brilliant scarlet and the powdered charcoal which traced her eyebrows in a continuous, fluted line across her forehead, she was beautiful with the rich, ripe beauty of the women who inspired Solomon of old to indite his *Song of Songs*. None but the Jewish race, or, perhaps, the Arabian, could have produced a woman with the passionate, alluring beauty of Miriam, the dancer in the house beneath the sea.

Back and forth across the checkered floor the girl wove her dance, tracing patterns intricate as lace from Canary or the looms of spiders over the marble with the soft soles of her velvet slippers, the chiming bells at her wrists and ankles keeping time to the calling, luring tune of the old hag

and her blind musicians with the consummate art of a Spanish castanet dancer following the music with her hand-cymbals.

At last the dance was done.

Shaking like a leaf with the intoxication of her own rhythmic movements, Miriam flung herself full length, face downward, before Goonong Besar, and lay upon the marble floor in utter, abject self-abasement.

What he said to her we did not understand, for the words were in harsh Malayan, but he must have given her permission to go, for she rose from her prostration like a dog expecting punishment when its master relents, and ran from the room, bracelets and anklets ringing time to her panic flight, pearls clicking together as they swayed with the motion of her *sarong*.

The old crone rose, too, and led her blind companions from the room, and we three sat staring at each other under the winking candles' light with the two impassive Malay guards standing motionless behind their master's chair.

"Do you think she is beautiful?" Goonong Besar asked as he lighted a cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke toward the copper ceiling.

"Beautiful?" de Grandin gasped, "*Mon Dieu, Monsieur,* she is wonderful, she is magnificent, she is superb. Death of my life, but she is divine! Never have I seen such a dancer; never such, such—*nom de Dieu,* I am speechless as the fish! In all the languages I know there are not words to describe her!"

"And you, Dr. Trowbridge, what do you think of my little Miriam?" Goonong addressed me.

"She is very lovely," I acknowledged, feeling the words foolishly inadequate.

"Ha, ha," he laughed good-naturedly. "Spoken with true Yankee conservatism, by Jove.

"And that, gentlemen," he continued, "leads us to an interesting little proposition I have to make you. But first you will smoke? You'll find these cigars really good. I import them from Havana." He passed the polished cedar humidor across the table and held a match for us to light our selections of the expensive tobacco.

"Now, then," he commenced, inhaling a deep lungful of smoke, "first a little family history, then my business proposition. Are you ready, gentlemen?"

De Grandin and I nodded, wondering mutely what the next chapter in this novel of incredible surprises would be.

"WHEN we met so auspiciously this afternoon," our host began in his pleasant voice, "I requested that you call me Goonong Besar. That, however, is what we might call, for want of a better term, merely my *nom de l'île.* Actually, gentlemen, I am the Almost Honorable James Abingdon Richardson.

"*Parbleu, Monsieur,*" de Grandin demanded, "how is it you mean that, 'the Almost Honorable'?"

The young man blew a cloud of fragrant smoke toward the room's copper ceiling and watched it float upward a moment before he replied: "My father was an English missionary, my mother a native princess. She was not of the Malay blood, but of the dominant Arab strain, and was known as Laila, Pearl of the Islands.

"My father had alienated himself from his family when he and an elder sister deserted the Church of England and, embracing a dissenting creed, came to Malaya to spread the gospel of repentance or damnation among the heathen in their blindness."

He drew thoughtfully at his cigar and smiled rather bitterly as he re-

sumed: "He was a fine figure of a man, that father of mine, six feet tall, blue-eyed and curly-haired, with a deep, compelling voice and the fire of fanaticism burning in his heart. The natives, Arab and Malay alike, took to his fiery gospel as the desert dwellers of Arabia once listened to the preaching of Mohammed, the camel driver. My grandfather, a pirate prince with a marble palace and a thousand slaves of his own, was one of the converts, and came to the mission bringing his ten-year-old daughter, Laila, with him. He left her at the mission school to learn the gentle teachings of the Prophet of Nazareth. She stayed there four years."

Again our host paused, puffing silently at his cigar, seemingly attempting to marshal his thoughts. "I believe I said my father was a dissenting clergyman? Yes, so I did, to be sure. Had he been a member of the established church things might have been different. The established English clergy are bad enough, with their fox hunting and general worldliness, but they're usually sportsmen. When she was a scant fifteen years old—women of the East mature more rapidly than your Western women, you know—Laila, the Pearl of the Islands, came back to her father's palace of marble and cedar, bearing a little boy baby in her arms. The charitable Christian sister of the missionary had driven her out of the mission settlement when she learned that she (the sister) was about to have a little nephew whose birth was not pre-sanctified by a wedding ring.

"The old pirate prince was furious. He would have put his daughter and her half-caste child to death and swooped down on the mission with fire and dagger, but my mother had learned much of Christian charity during her stay at the school. She was sure, if she went to my father with as many pearls as her two hands could hold, and with a dowry of rubies strung round her neck, he would receive her as his wife—er—make an honest woman of her, as the saying goes.

"However, one thing and another prevented her return to the mission for three years, and when we finally got there we found my reverend sire had taken an English lady to wife.

"Oh, he took the jewels my mother brought—no fear of his refusing—and in return for them he permitted us to live in the settlement as native hangers-on. She, a princess, and the daughter of generations of princesses, scrubbed floors and baked bread in the house presided over by my father's wife, and I, my father's first-born son, duly christened with his name, fetched and carried for my father's younger sons.

"They were hard, those days at the mission school. The white boys who were my half-brothers overlooked no chance to remind me of my mother's shame and my own disgrace. Humility and patience under affliction were the lessons my mother and I had ground into us day by day while we remained there.

"Then, when I was a lad of ten years or so, my father's cousin, Viscount Abingdon, broke his neck at a fox hunt, and, as he died without issue, my father became a member of England's landed gentry, and went back home to take over the title and the entails. He borrowed on his expectancy before he left and offered my mother money to have me educated as a clerk in some trader's store, but my mother, for all her years of servitude, was still a princess of royal blood. Also she remembered enough Scripture to quote, 'Thy money perish with thee.' So she spat in his face and went back to the palace of her father, telling him that her husband was dead.

"I was sent to school in England—oh, yes, I'm a public school man, Winchester, you know—and I was down

from my first term at Cambridge when the war broke out in 1914.

"Why should I have fought for England? What had England or the English ever done for me? It was the call of the blood—the English blood—perhaps. At any rate I joined up and was gazetted to a London regiment. Everything was death or glory those days, you know, 'For King and Country,' and all that sort of tosh. Racial lines were wiped out, and every man, whatever his color or creed, was for the common cause. Rot!

"I came into the officers' mess one night after a hard day's drill, and was presented to a young man from one of the guards regiments. 'Lieutenant Richardson,' my captain said, 'this is Lieutenant Richardson. Queer coincidence, you chaps are both James Abingdon Richardson. Ought to be great pals on that account, what?'

"The other Lieutenant Richardson looked me over from head to foot, then repeated distinctly, so everyone in the room could hear and understand, 'James, my boots need polishing. Attend to it.' It was the same order he had given me at the mission school a hundred times when we were lads together. He was Lieutenant the Honorable James Abingdon Richardson, *legitimate* eldest son of Viscount Abingdon. I was——"

He broke off, staring straight before him a moment, then:

"There was a devil of a row. Officers weren't supposed to beat other officers into insensibility in company mess, you know. I was dismissed from the service, and came back to the islands.

"My grandfather was dead; so was my mother. I was monarch of all I surveyed—if I was willing not to look too far—and since my return I have consecrated my life to repaying my debt to my father on such of his race as crossed my path.

"The hunting has been fairly good, too. White men are such fools! Ship after ship has run aground on the rocks here, sometimes in answer to my signal rockets, sometimes mistaking the red and green lamps on the hill up yonder for ships' lights.

"It's been profitable. Nearly every ship so far has contained enough loot to make the game distinctly worth the trouble. I must admit your ship was somewhat of a disappointment in respect of monetary returns, but then I have had the pleasure of your company; that's something.

"I keep a crew of Papuans around to do the dirty work, and let 'em eat a few prisoners now and then by way of reward—don't mind an occasional helping of 'long pig' myself, as a matter of fact, provided it's a white one.

"But"—he smiled unpleasantly—"conditions aren't ideal, yet. I still have to install electricity in the house and rig up a wireless apparatus—I could catch more game that way—and then there's the question of women. Remember how Holy Writ says, 'It is not good for man to dwell alone'? I've found it out, already.

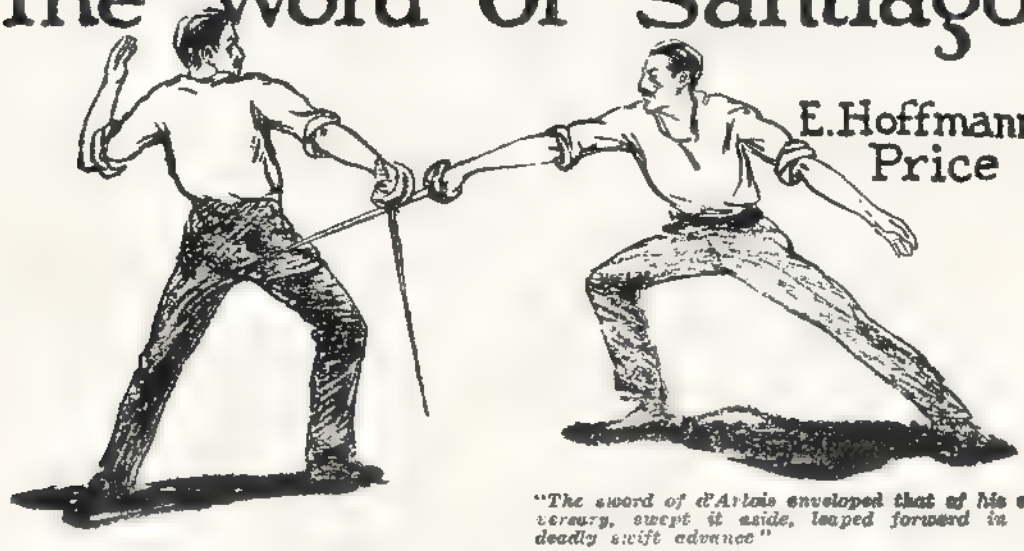
"Old Umera, the woman who played the drum tonight, and the slave girl, Miriam, are the only women in the establishment, thus far, but I intend to remedy that—soon. I shall send to one of the larger islands and buy several of the most beautiful maidens available within the next few months, and live as befits a prince—a pirate prince, even as my grandfather was.

"Now, white men"—his suave manner dropped from him like a mask let down, and implacable hatred glared from his dark eyes,—"this is my proposition to you. Before I establish my seraglio it is necessary that I possess suitable furniture. I can not spare any of my faith-

(Continued on page 275)

The Word Of Santiago

E. Hoffmann Price



"The sword of d'Arlois enveloped that of his adversary, swept it aside, leaped forward in its deadly swift advance"

IN a somber, black-tapestried room of a château perched high on a Pyreneean crest overlooking both France and Spain, was an altar, a block of teakwood whose thirty-three grotesquely carved panels depicted the thirty-three strange diversions of gods and men: age-old monstrosities, bold in their antique frankness; unsavory survivals of primitive fancies; the materialized visions of unhallowed Asian mysteries.

On either side of this altar stood the silver effigy of a peacock, whose outspread fan rose, and, drooping forward, joined that of its mate so as to form a canopy, a miniature shrine. Before this shrine smoldered two brazen censers whose pale fumes serpentined caressingly about the slim, three-edged *épée* whose keen point was embedded in the teakwood pedestal. The bell guard and grip of the blade were severely plain; but the pommel was crowned with the tiny image of a silver peacock whose painted fan was star-dusted with pale sapphires, cool emeralds, flaring rubies, and fiercely glittering diamonds. Such was the shrine, and such the deity thereof.

The heavy door of the room opened silently, admitting into the somber twilight the tall, black-robed figure of Don Santiago, the acolyte of that strange altar. Moving as one who walks in a dream, the Spaniard advanced and struck light to the thirty-three black tapers about the altar. Their red, wavering flames filled the room with a flickering, sinister glow, revealing groups of grotesques embroidered in silver thread upon the room's black, silken draperies, each group marking one of the four cardinal points of the compass.

Retreating a pace, the Spaniard, arms extended, faced the four points, before each inclining his head as in salutation. Last of all he bowed low before the shrine, its silver peacocks, and slender, frosty white blade.

"I prefer Cain to Abel, and Nimrud to Javeh," he intoned sonorously; "I prefer Esau to Jacob and Iblis to Allah; and Thee, Malik Taûs, I exalt above gods and all powers; and to Thee, Omnipotent Rebel, I raise my prayer and lift my eyes."

He paused, touched with his fingertips first his temples, then his lips; then, crossing his arms on his

breast, the Spaniard made obeisance once more before that gleaming shrine.

"Lord of the Outer Marches, Prince of the Borderland, hear my prayer and grant my desire! Grant me victory over the arrogant one, grant me the defeat of him who mocks at Thy servants, of him who made of me a show and a mockery. Thou who rulest the world, Thou who hast made the world Thine own, hear me, Malik Taûs, Lord Peacock, hear me and give me the strength to prevail over him who holdeth Thee in scorn, him who hath offended Thy servant. Hear me, High Sovereign, Rebel Prince, Dark Lord! Thou who art power made absolute, Thousand-Eyed Malik Taûs, hear me and grant me victory!"

The flickering tapers rose to tall, sinuous flames; the censers fumed in heavy, twining serpents. With a final obeisance, Don Santiago turned from the altar. But ere he could gain the door, it opened to admit an intruder.

"And what may be your pleasure?" demanded Don Santiago, confronting his visitor.

Somewhere, at some time, he had seen those lean, haughty features, those cold, relentless eyes, that tall, erect form.

The intruder smiled with the cool reserve of the superior person in the presence of one almost his equal, then, looking the Spaniard squarely in the eye, made a curious, fleeting gesture with his left hand, as with his right he flung aside a fold of his cape.

"What? Am I then unknown to you, Don Santiago?"

Don Santiago started, blinked in amazement, then bowed low in recognition of the gesture and of the peacock that flamed on the stranger's breast.

"Welcome, Lord and Master! And my prayer. . . . Will it be granted?"

"Don Santiago," began the Spaniard's visitor, "you have served me well, and I am appreciative. But your request passes the limits of reason. This one prayer I can not grant. You have challenged d'Artois to meet you in secret, by moonlight at the Spring of St. Leon, to engage in mortal combat; and now you pray for victory. Know then that this d'Artois serves me well, and as truly as you do; and I can not permit you to slay him."

"Serves you?" queried the Spaniard in amazement. "Master, he is not of the elect; he serves your Adversary, the Nazarene whom we defy and scorn."

The Master smiled sardonically.

"Nonsense, Santiago! Was it not once said by the Adversary, 'All that take the sword shall perish by the sword'? And has not this d'Artois fought several duels, in each meeting slaying his opponent, so that it is now unlawful for him to fight a duel in France? Now were I to permit him to fall by your hand, would I not be testifying to the truth of that which was spoken in Galilee a very long time ago?"

"But," protested Santiago, "d'Artois always has a just cause, defending that to which you are opposed. He is a true servant of the Nazarene."

The Lord Peacock smiled scornfully.

"It is also written, 'And to him that striketh thee on one cheek, offer also the other.' And therefore, d'Artois, though he never met me face to face as you have, yet serves me well; for instead of offering his other cheek, he draws a keen blade which he handles with a skill that even I could envy.

"Santiago," continued the Master, with a half-sorrowful, half-quizzical smile, "how I am misunderstood, even by my servants! Do you not yet know that all the strong, the proud, the haughty and wilful serve me, whether or not they acknowledge me?

Do you not know that many a man who leads a life of magnificent vice and monumental folly, instead of serving me, serves the Nazarene instead, seeing that he is an example whereof the priests avail themselves to seduce the world from me? And do you not know that those who forsake their luxurious sins to follow the Nazarene serve me best of all, since they, in telling of their redemption, entice those who dare sin only after having been assured of the efficacy of repentance, and of eventual forgiveness? Have you ever thought that this Nazarene in his humility is more arrogant than I in my colossal pride, which led me to prefer elemental fire and abysmal darkness to servitude and bondage? Santiago, even you, the most faithful and talented of my servants, do not understand me."

Malik Taûs sighed as does one burdened with the cares of a universe.

"No, Santiago, I can not turn against him who, though unwittingly, serves me as well as you. In a word, I forbid this meeting; for d'Artois is the more skilful, and will surely slay you. Nor can I let you slay him; for in either case, I lose, and my empery is diminished. In these degenerate days when civilization has nearly outlawed dueling, should I not prize those rare few who love the sword, and contrive to use it well?"

"But, Master," persisted the Spaniard, "I have given my word; I can not withdraw my challenge. Is then your promise of success in all my ventures thus to be canceled in my hour of need?"

"You can and you shall withdraw, Santiago," commanded the Master sternly, his dark eyes gleaming menacingly. "You shall not keep this rendezvous. I forbid it."

The Spaniard glared defiantly into the cold, fierce eyes of the Master.

"Malik Taûs, my word is good, even though you fail in yours. And therefore do I deny and disown you, and defy you to the uttermost. For whatever may be the penalty, in this world or the next, my word freely given must and shall be kept."

"And I, Don Santiago," came the cool response, "shall devise so that you shall not keep it. Therefore accept my warning, and beware my wrath. *Vaya con Dios,*" he concluded with a mocking smile.

And with a courtly bow the Master turned and departed.

"Fraud! Impostor!" snarled Don Santiago.

Seizing from the tapestried wall an ancient battle-ax, he battered beyond all recognition the silver peacocks, and utterly defaced the obscenely carved altar of teak. But the slim sword remained true and straight and faultless, resisting his efforts to snap it across his knee.

PIERRE D'ARTOIS laid aside his mask and blade, regarding with a quizzical smile the perspiring features and shaking hand of his valet-secretary-fencing partner.

"Why such an effort? Is it then so difficult to touch me once in an afternoon? But listen, Jannicot: tonight at 12 I meet a friend by moonlight at the Spring of St. Leon. There will be no seconds, no director, not even a surgeon. One of us will remain there until his friends call for the vanquished."

"But this is folly!" protested Jannicot. "You may go into an ambush. Or for want of speedy attention, you may die of your wounds."

"Nonsense! For very good reasons we must meet in secret. The twentieth century frowns upon sword play, even here in France. Anyway, he is a man of honor. There will be no ambush. No surgeon will be required. I am no bungler; neither is he. One thrust, his or mine, will suffice. Surgery would be wasted effort. Therefore if I do not meet you at the appointed time. . . ."

"But how do you know that he will be there? You have not heard from him for over a month. It is rumored that he is in Spain; others claim that he is in Morocco. He may fail you entirely."

"The word of Santiago is good. He will not fail me. Dead, drunk, or dying, he will be there."

"But these treacherous Spaniards! An ambush. . . ."

"Bah! He is a man of honor. And moreover, I must keep my word, even as he will keep his. And now, Jannicot, I will sleep. Awaken me at 10."

At the stroke of 10, d'Artois arose, and dressed with as much care and deliberation as though he were about to make his customary morning promenade.

"Idiot!" reproved d'Artois, as Jannicot came tottering in under the weight of a great tray; "am I then a python? Assassin! Would you have me gorge myself? *À bas!* Bring me a cut of cold meat and a bit of sauterne. And by the way, Jannicot, if you will solemnly promise not to seek me until two hours after midnight, you may drive me to within a kilometer of the Spring of St. Leon. I must not tire my hand or eye. You promise? *Eh bien, allons!*"

The powerful Issotta roadster leaped forward into the night like some great cat upon its prey. Kilometer after kilometer they sped, up grade and down, winding their way through the curves and dips of the great highway that, running through the Pyrenees, leads to Bayonne. Like a bird of prey they swooped into and through St. Jean de Luz. Then at a slower pace they picked their way on until the slim, silvery spires of the old cathedral of Bayonne appeared high above the dark blot of the groves surrounding the city.

"Park here, Jannicot, and await my return. And if in two hours I am not with you, seek me."

"But why two hours?"

"So that the survivor may be assured a fair departure."

Jannicot, depressed by the thought of that secret encounter, man to man on the green at the Spring of St. Leon, shivered as he saw his master draw from the tonneau a pair of slender *épées*. Their sinister gleam in moonlight made him shudder. He sought to grasp his master's hand.

"Nonsense, Jannicot! I could touch the devil himself tonight. Thus: the illogical parry, the uncanny *riposte*," he continued, as his blade flickered through its deceptive, sweeping *parades*. "It is timing, Jannicot. You are young and active, yet have you ever deceived my parry, or avoided my *riposte*? It can not be done; the man is not born who can escape me. And remember your word. *À bientôt!*"

D'Artois saluted with his blade, tucked it under his left arm to keep its mate company, then turned and picked his way across the street, and was lost in the black depths of the grove at whose opposite end was the Spring of St. Leon.

"I am early," reflected d'Artois, as he entered the empty clearing. He glanced at his watch. It lacked a minute of midnight. Alone. . . . . yet not entirely alone. A sinister, foreboding presence seemed to lurk about him. D'Artois shivered, toyed with the hilts of his *épées*, peered into the shadows, listened for the approach of his adversary. The great cathedral clock struck midnight.

And then a voice, soft, courteous.

"I trust that I have not kept you waiting long? I was detained in Spain."

D'Artois turned to confront Don Santiago.

"Not at all," he replied with a bow. "But your approach was silent."

"What? Would you expect a fanfare of trumpets? Are we not both

outlaws, forbidden to meet on the field of honor in France?"

"Quite so, Don Santiago. But which end will you take? *Ça m'est égal!*"

With a gesture of his blade, d'Artois indicated the smooth, unbroken green before them.

"It is of no import, Monsieur d'Artois. The moon is almost overhead; the ground is level; and there are no shadows to favor either."

IN SILENCE the adversaries stripped to the waist, stamped on the short grass to try its footing, poised and flexed their blades, each selecting one of his pair. And each courteously declined to inspect the other's blade to see that it conformed to custom and regulation.

Pierre d'Artois, slim and erect as an obelisk, faced his adversary, his sword at the carry.

"For the mastery of the world, Don Santiago. . . . *en garde!*"

With sinuous, serpentine grace they went through the evolutions of the salute preliminary to a bout. Each recoiled a pace and out of reach, with that catlike, swift smoothness of a polished swordsman.

Don Santiago advanced warily, the point of his *épée* tracing fine, imperceptible circles in the air, a menacing, vibrant, silvery death. D'Artois, motionless, frozen in place, immobile as the pyramids, stood his ground, revealing the master who never wastes a move. And none but a master would dare await, cold-footed, the attack of that swift, hawklike Spaniard; for immobility, while confounding the adversary, causes the passive, watchful one to "freeze", to lose the fine alertness of his nerves.

The Spaniard's vicious feint had no effect, drew not the sign of a parry. A fierce beat failed to shake the master's firm wrist. But the strain of immobility seemed to tell on d'Artois: his wrist, drooping slightly, shifted his guard, leaving his forearm exposed. Don Santiago's blade reached forth with the darting stab of a serpent's stroke, his arm fully extended. The sword of d'Artois enveloped that of his adversary, swept it aside, leaped forward in its deadly swift advance. But the subtle Spaniard, prepared for the trap, withdrew, so that the thrust fell short. In sheer bravado, he had dropped his guard in retreating, showing how well he had gaged his adversary's reach.

Again they came on guard. This time the play was light, swift, staccato, a dizzying interchange of attack, counterattack, parry and *riposte*. The honors were even; each recognized in the other a master, a cunning, deadly opponent, each with a wondrous sense of time, a keen eye, and a sure hand. Bird of prey and bird of prey had met, circling, swooping, awaiting that inevitable instant in every bout when one of the adversaries suffers a momentary dulling of the nerves, fatal relaxation of watchfulness. That moment, and that moment alone, could decide the day; for in skill they matched each other; in that cold, passionless, impersonal hatred begotten of the touch of steel upon steel they matched each other; master and master had met.

As *phrase* succeeded *phrase*, the Spaniard noted that, despite the wondrous succession of sweeping parries, infinitely varied and perfectly executed, d'Artois, when hard pressed, favored the double *contre sixte*. And this he bore in mind, and smiled his thin, crooked smile.

A pause in the fierceness of the fencing; a moment's slackening of tension. Then, without sign or warning, came the Spaniard's thrust, twice avoiding the flashing succession of double *contre sixte*, and home. . . , but not for a touch; for the blade of d'Artois. point dropped, swept across his body from *sixte to prime*, brushing aside the blade of Santiago, then

leaped forward in a *riposte* that was to impale the Spaniard: that wondrous, incredible parry and reply that none but a genius or madman would dare employ. But again the Spaniard withdrew, so that the advance of d'Artois fell short by the width of a finger.

Out of reach, d'Artois dropped his guard.

"Beautiful, Don Santiago! *Magnifique!* And I would have sworn that none but the devil himself could have escaped me."

The Spaniard smiled coolly, and bowed in acknowledgment.

"A truce, Don Santiago! The victor will never again find a worthy opponent."

"*En garde!*" snapped the Spaniard.

And once again the staccato click-click of the blades, the tinkle of blade on bell guards, the hoarse breathing of the contestants. Don Santiago with the ferocity of a tiger pressed his opponent to the utmost, ever watchful for that one fatal slip; but at last, tiring of his vain assaults, seeking a moment's respite, slackened the tension. Slowly, rhythmically, he advanced, retreated, feinted, parried, weaving backward, forward, in a steady march, a fixed cadence. Slowly but certainly d'Artois succumbed to the spell of that soporific rhythm as to the hypnotic passes of a mesmerist, replying with a lifeless parry to a languid feint, advancing, retreating in time to the cadence beat by the Spaniard's caressing movements, even as one who, listlessly, unconsciously beats time with his foot to the faint strains of distant music. It was not blade to blade, but will against will, the invisible matching of intangible weapons.

With a thrill of horror, with a shudder of sudden awakening, d'Artois realized his peril, realized that the Spaniard sought to lull him to sleep, then, with an abrupt change of pace, run him through ere he could accommodate himself to the shift in cadence.

On the trail of this revelation came inspiration: two could play at that game. There would be some instant wherein Don Santiago could be caught off his guard, lulled to sleep by his own mesmeric passes, lulled by the very response of d'Artois, the victim to be.

Another languid feint; to which Don Santiago replied with a *contre sixte*, a meaningless gesture, seeing that the thrust of d'Artois was no true menace, but merely the response to the Spaniard's hypnotic, caressing evolutions. . . . and d'Artois, accelerating on the instant the speed of his advance, sank into a full lunge, chin almost on his knee, slipping under the Spaniard's guard, clear of the point which was a shade too high. No parry, no *coup d'arrêt*, no retreat could avoid the deadly swiftness of that lunge. The Spaniard was trapped in his own snare!

As d'Artois slipped forward, he knew that nothing on earth could halt his impaling blade.

A blinding, elemental flame flared before his eyes as his *épée* sank home; a blinding, consuming flame that seared and lashed him, enfolded him. Then blackness, Cimmerian, absolute, as he pitched forward, arm extended, face to the ground.

And meanwhile, Jannicot paced restlessly in circles about the Issotta roadster, smoking countless cigarettes, assuring himself that all would be well.

Half past 12. . . 1 o'clock. . . Perhaps Don Santiago had been delayed. . . half past 1. . . . what duel could last that long, even between cunning, wary fencers, master opposed to master?

Forgetful of his promise, forgetful of all save his concern for d'Artois, Jannicot plunged into the blackness

of the grove, picked the path, and, panic-stricken, stumbled toward the Spring of St. Leon. At the edge of the clearing he halted, stunned by the sight that confronted him. For an instant, dumb terror and dismay paralyzed him, blinded him. Then, closely examining the inert form of d'Artois, he searched, but in vain, for a wound.

"*Salaud!* Struck him down from ambush!" he growled as he scooped up from the spring a hatful of water, dashing it full into his master's face. Then, still seeking to revive d'Artois, he noted the trampled grass, the signs of prolonged combat.

D'Artois stirred, muttered incoherently. Jannicot, picking him bodily from the green, staggered back to the Issotta with his burden. D'Artois, somewhat recovered, though still muttering unintelligibly, took a draft of the cognac Jannicot offered.

"I'm all right. Drive on."

D'Artois shuddered, drew about himself his cloak. The terror of that moon-drenched clearing still overwhelmed him, dulled him, oppressed him with an indescribable horror. What had struck him? What had he touched? That abysmal flame still flared before his eyes.

The Issotta once more leaped into the darkness, speeding up that ribbonlike road with a full-throated roar. Clouds obscured the moon. A haze enveloped the car, so that its headlights could reach but a few yards ahead. Jannicot, sorely puzzled by the mystery of the evening, drove desperately. D'Artois slumped back in his seat, unnerved, still consumed with strange surmises.

Then the shrill scream of brakes; and the speeding Issotta, whipping and skidding, came to a halt but a few meters short of an obstacle, a wrecked car that blocked their path.

Jannicot leaped from the wheel, followed by d'Artois, who had partly recovered from his lethargy. Pinned under the wreckage was an apparently lifeless form, face to the ground.

D'Artois drew from his tool chest a jack with which he lifted the wreck.

"Nasty turn here. . . . Poor devil . . . but he may not be dead," he murmured, as he drew the unconscious victim clear of the debris. Then, in utter astonishment, "Don Santiago!"

"*Crapule!*" flared Jannicot, likewise recognizing the battered features of the Spaniard. "Served him right, having you struck down from ambush. Coward, he fled too fast!"

"But we can't leave him here. Get a surgeon, Jannicot."

"Spare yourselves the trouble, *Messieurs,*" counseled a calm, sonorous voice from behind them. "He has been dead over two hours. . . . wrecked . . . driving out of Spain in great haste. . ."

"*Two hours? Out of Spain?*

"Look at the tracks."

The stranger with a gesture indicated the trace of the wrecked car's wheels, then, disregarding their questions, continued his way down the road to Spain, speaking in a low tone, apparently to someone accompanying him.

"Santiago, though you defied me, you are a man after my own heart; for even Death, my servant, could not prevent you from keeping your word."

The Avenging Hand

by Roy Wallace Davis

"The giant hand, the huge hairy arm that had fallen near me during the fight, were now part of my brother."

I HAD been on the island of Corda less than three days when there came to me the ominous feeling that all was not well. Being thousands of miles from home in the jungled hills of the remotest of the South Sea islands was in nowise an inviting predicament for a youth of seventeen. Only four white men inhabited the place: myself, my elder brother, Louis, who had worked here for years in the service of a forestry company; and two young scientists, who had spent months on the island endeavoring to obtain from the natives the formula for a great healing medicine, which contained a certain sap substance from a rare plant found no other place in the world. By chance these men had heard of the medical feat of the brown-skin Cordans, and had sought every possible means of getting a sample of the medicine or of learning its ingredients, that they might startle the medical world by contributing the medicine to the surgical profession. Yet, despite every inducement of brilliant and colorful jewels and unreasonable promises, the little men of the semi-savage tribes had demurred, looking on the pale-face men with suspicion, and concealing their great discovery for their own use.

But my interest was in none of these projects. Another problem confronted every human being on the island, myself more than anyone else, I thought, for it loomed before me as an incomprehensible and horrible mystery, suggesting itself to me only through the exotic actions of the island's populace. Conversations of the white men in low tones that increased day by day, and ceased when I came near, combined with the furtive actions of the natives, filled me with suspicion and brought over my life an inauspicious fear.

Then on a dull and gloomy September afternoon it was that the reason for the surreptitious performances of all was revealed to me. My brother called me to his side, and in a concise story related to me the situation before us—that which had kept him in a constant state of uneasiness since my arrival on the island. In this story he divulged the facts that haunted my soul. His words were the turning point of my life as I sat there listening, spellbound.

Some months before, the story ran, my brother had encountered a family

of beings, manlike in form, yet larger than men ever grew, covered with a thin, ugly growth of dark brown hair, and having teeth resembling fangs rather than those of men. On being attacked by the monsters, he had killed the entire group except the father. Then his ammunition was gone, and he escaped from the island in his boat only to be followed by the angered thing to Corda. Once here he had replenished his supply of shots and wounded the beast, he thought fatally. Several weeks later it was found out he had not rid the island of the great terror. Lingering in the dense jungles of the island between life and death for some time, it had again come forth with revenge in its heart and with the determination to rule or ruin.

Now the mind of the sturdy young forester was confronted with a problem that terrorized his very soul day and night—one of the two must die! Not only did he consider the loss of himself, provided he must yield to the great giant, but the young scientists and I would become the victims of its wrath. We could all leave; they could abandon the long-worked projects, but Louis was born of a spirit unlike this. He had brought on the enmity, and he would fight the battle against the appeal of all of us.

The appearance of the brute on the island had apparently affected the lives of the natives even more than those of the white men. They regarded the huge creature as a forest-devil possessing divine power, and believed that it had been sent among them to destroy all life on the island to atone for the wrong done its kind. In their crude signs they predicted evil of the most diabolical nature to Louis' life for killing the monsters. Though they dreaded the beast, they dared not take any action toward killing it, because of their religious belief that when the last of a group is wiped out its spirit will come back to keep alive the memory of the group, and thus torment them. Again and again they had cautioned Louis, telling him the significance the death of the beast would have. But their predictions were in vain. It had come to his hut many nights in its attempted attacks, and he would not delay the battle a night longer. The next time he would accept the challenge.

"Tonight," Louis told me in a hesitating but determined voice, "I may die. You may die too then, and if so, the same fate will likely befall the scientists. If you are spared, go back home, and remember I died like a man."

The dreadful reality that I had heard of the hideous being on the island brought over me a horripilation that tormented my mind incessantly until I even wished the end would not be prolonged. The afternoon had worn away quietly, and night was closing over us, bringing with it the feeling that it would be my last. A clear, full moon lighted Corda as the tower lamp illuminates the city square, but like the shadows of the great skyscrapers, the tall pines of the little island threw a gloom here and there over the stunted underbrush that clothed the rocky hills around our cabin. It was in these shadows that a huge figure lurked, now and then zigzagging its way from one clump to the next, evidently believing itself to be unobserved. There was no alternative—our hut was its destination, and the hour of its long-planned stroke of vengeance was at hand.

My mind was suddenly obsessed with a feeling of terror I had never known before, and my sensations became indescribably horrible as that huge, giantlike beast-man came undaunted, fearlessly on, nearer and nearer to the hut. I was unnerved, weak, for my brother's life and my

own were in his hands, and I realized that I was helpless.

The wretched silence of waiting for death, which seemed hours rather than minutes, was broken by Louis. I turned my eyes, which had been fixed to and following the beast, to my brother. There was no time to pity him, and moreover neither of us owed pity to the other, for this brute, that came with vengeance in its heart, came not with any human scruples; we should both die alike, falling in the clutches of that powerful figure to be paralyzed, torn to pieces and devoured.

I had only time to breathe a short, hurried prayer, and I believe I asked for strength for my brother against this mighty manlike animal that came to crush him.

Louis' hand intuitively gripped the revolver that had hung to his side since the presence of the giant on the island. His conclusion had been to meet the brute in the open, for there he would have more chance in battle than in the small space of the hut. He reached for the dirk-knife in the wall and felt its razorlike edge, which he had recently whetted for the purpose it was to serve tonight. He would not await the attack, but would meet his assailant half-way.

As Louis stepped from the shadow of the cabin into the bright rays of the moon the awful realization of my plight came over me like a new discovery and rendered me even more helpless than before. Suddenly, as if rising from out of the earth, a grotesque, humanlike figure emerged from a clump of pines not fifty feet from where I stood pinned to the ground, and, crouching low, rushed on the man it meant to destroy. Like a flash the most gruesome picture I had ever seen filled my gaze for a second, and then all became blank. I remember the incident as a haunting nightmare. A huge figure like a man and yet like a beast moved swiftly past me, rising as it came to its full height of some seven feet. The flashing eyes and hairy face and body stamped indelibly on my memory the picture I can never forget. With the long, clawlike fingers of its enormous, hairy hands clenched tight, and a hideous, unshapely face that expressed vengeance, the mighty being sprang toward its intended victim. Two shots rang out in the stillness of the night, followed by an unearthly scream that chilled the blood in my veins.

In the light of the moon I saw that awful being cringe in pain, clench its jaws in a fit of agony, and grasp the man in its powerful arms. I thought I could hear every bone in his body being crushed under the grip of the brute, and felt that I should leap upon it to die with him, but I could not move from the spot where I stood cringing and trying, but in vain, to turn my eyes away. Agonizing screams of pain now came from a familiar yet different voice. Louis was dying the most horrible death imaginable before my eyes, while I stood helpless. I was rooted to the ground, and cold drops of sweat exuded from and stood on my forehead.

Then came a furious scramble in which the interlocked forms clutched and rolled over and over on the ground. The man of the woods had not given way to the mighty strength of the beast, and the forceful, yet comparatively weak, struggle that he made to hold off death as long as possible was tearing my heart. Once he freed himself from the clutches of those huge, ugly arms and leaped away only to be overpowered again and borne to the ground. A bright steel object flashed in the moonlight, and shrieks of pain filled the still night air. The mighty figure whirled

frantically in every direction now, with its foe clinging about its shoulders. The tide of battle had evidently turned; the strength of the beast was being matched by the skill of man. Horrifying cries now came incessantly from both; the suspense, which at last was filled with hope, was brain-racking. Suddenly a heavy object fell at my feet. The mighty beast-man lunged forward with a force that sent Louis in a heap several yards away. A bloody stub of an arm waved in the air as the great form reeled with a deafening groan and dropped at my feet, dead.

The battle was over. I ran to the motionless body of my brother, leaned over him and listened. His body was covered with blood that spurted from his right arm. I attempted turning him over to make a closer examination, but the sight that met my eyes made my heart sink. His arm below the elbow clung to his body only by a small piece of skin.

Deathly sick at heart, I fairly flew over the hills of the little island, spurred on by one desperate purpose. Then the little village of the natives, not far from our hut, came into view. The natives and their healing medicine had been my first thought, I having remembered what the scientists had told me of the almost magic power of the sap properties in the medicine. I dashed into the midst of the grass-covered huts, made a desperate effort to speak, and fell in a dead faint.

THREE days later I opened my eyes to find myself lying on a small bed in the rear of our hut. This was the awaking from a long, unconscious sleep that had begun when I fell exhausted in the village of the natives. One of the natives of the island stood beside the bed, half naked and grinning broadly. In his own tongue he chattered something that was incomprehensible to me, and opening the door to the adjoining room, beckoned to me to enter. In my weakened condition I raised myself from the bed and walked unsteadily to where he stood, still grinning and chattering. Then the sight met my eyes that recalled all the horrible memories of the dreadful struggle, and drove me almost to distraction. Louis was on the bed in the corner of the room and beside him lay the huge, hairy arm that had fallen near me during the fight—it was now a part of my brother.

I could see it all now. The great healing power of the medicine had not been exaggerated. The evidence of that was before me. Also I now clearly understood the smile of the natives that stood about the room. The spirit of the mighty forest-devil could not come back to hover over them and pour out its wrath upon them, for there yet remained life in the arm of the beast that had been grafted by their skill and medicine on the stub of my brother's arm. In their minds they had appeased the wrath of the beast-man by preserving some of its life. Now, they thought, if there was any resentment of the beast remaining it would be directed toward the man that had taken its life. Thus, by the operation, they had preserved some of the life of the forest-devil and at the same time made friends, they thought, with this divine monster by torturing its slayer forever with the presence of the hand that would be a horror to his life.

Louis was convalescing rapidly under the special care of the natives, who knew that his death would mean the cessation of life in the arm of the divine devil, and bring back the spirit of the beast to torment them. In less than five weeks after the killing of his dreaded foe he was up and walking about the hut. The medical men

were now striving more than ever in their efforts to produce the correct formula for the wonderful medicine, which the natives continually refused to give out. The little brown-skin islanders had retired again to their own village, happy over the success of the operation. To me they were a group of arrogant and insidious beings to be despised. As a result of their actions I had to turn in horror from the person that meant everything to my happiness.

In the days that followed, the odious organ became more and more obnoxious to my brother. It was inimical to his rest and peace, and it refused to function at his command. At night the arm jerked wildly, until within two months after the grafting, his brain seemed to have no power over it.

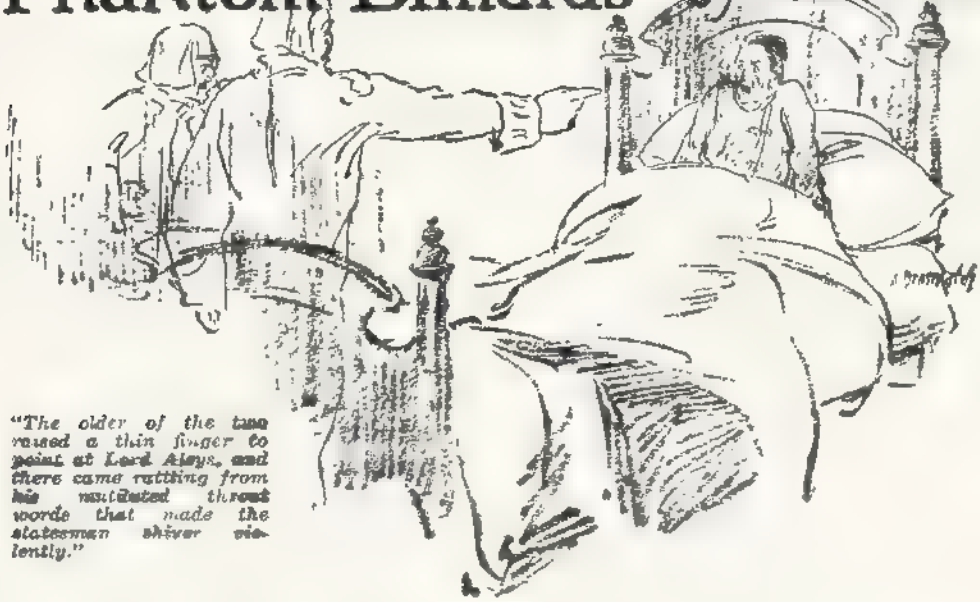
One night I was awakened by a quick movement as if someone had attempted shoving me from the bed. I turned to look at Louis, who slept with me now, and then with a scream that deafened me, I landed with a single leap in the corner of the room. Collecting my senses, I lighted the lantern. Lying on his back, Louis was struggling with his clenched knees and left arm to loose the giant hand that clutched his throat. Beating down a fear that held me back, I sprang on him, and with all my strength, loosed the hold. The arm moved slowly down to his side as if subdued.

My brain felt paralyzed. The most unearthly problem that ever faced man was before me now. The spirit of revenge instilled in a bodily organ other than the brain was impossible, I thought; yet there was the evidence. One solution came to my mind, and I set myself to immediate action. With a strong rope I tied the arm at the wrist to the heavy log bed-frame. The pale and livid form of my brother was sickening to see as he lay there terror-stricken and exhausted. On the morrow I would have the repulsive organ amputated and hurled into the sea to its master, while in the meantime I would sleep in the adjoining room. I had touched that thing my last time.

Weary and tired from fear and restlessness I soon fell into a troubled sleep once more. How long I slept I can not remember, but the awakening shortly after midnight remains yet stamped in my mind as the most horrible feeling I have ever known. In the silence of the dark night I strained my ears for the sound which I prayed had been only imaginary. Then the terrible realization that I had not been mistaken came over me and bound me in weakness to the bed. Again and again I heard it, plainer now than ever. My auditory faculties became more and more sentient until to me it roared like thunder. The straining of the powerful arm against the rope that bound it grated louder and louder. Then came the whining of the man in his struggle against the calamity that was inevitable. The whines rose to cries as minutes lengthened to hours. The rope could not stand the strain much longer—it was parting now, strand by strand. The break was like the explosion of a cannon to me. Screams of terror rang in my ears, followed by a hurried bustle, then a gasping for breath. The gasps became longer and less audible, weakening until they could scarcely be heard.

For a moment I had become insensible. Then I remembered my brother and listened, but the stillness of the night had closed over the hut once more, and the struggle that had broken the peace and quiet of the little island of Corda had ceased forever. My brother had been strangled by the avenging hand of the man-beast.

Phantom Billiards by Frank E. Walker



"The older of the two raised a thin finger to point at Lord Alys, and there came rattling from his mutilated throat words that made the statesman shiver violently."

LIKE wildfire the news spread throughout the village of Sussey. From the time the postman rode through early in the afternoon until the lamps were lighted in the cottages at dusk, it was on every tongue. A new master and mistress were coming to live in Hadley Hall!

Old women shivered at the thought and old men gloomily shook their heads. Outside the little vine-covered cottage of Giles the Woodchopper, young Hal Wilkerson had stopped to exchange a cheery word with the wise old fellow. Their small talk soon turned to the coming of new tenants to Hadley.

" 'Tis a sad thing—a sad thing," old Giles muttered, his eyes dim with memories. "I am told they are but newly wed. A happy man and his young bride. A sad thing!"

"But why?" young Hal queried. "You know I am but lately come to Sussey, tell me why it is so sad a thing that these folk should come to live in Hadley. 'Tis a fair enough estate, and the Hall is a stately pile. Yet I have heard strange tales about it. Tell me what makes the place so terrible."

"Aye! That I will!" the old man answered, with a dull gleam in his eye. "That I will, for it will serve to keep you away from it, who are young and happy and like to live many a year. Sit you down here, and give me ear."

When Hal had seated himself on the bench, the old man told him the story of Hadley Hall.

"IT WAS nigh a score years ago that it happened, the thing that has made Hadley a place to be shunned when there is no moon, or the clouds hide her face. Before that unlucky day Sir Michael and his brother, the brave young Bertram, had always been as faithful and true to each other as brothers could ever be. Unmarried they were, and they had lived there ever since the death of their mother, the gentle Blanche, eight years before.

"In France they had been until news reached them that their father, fiery old Sir William, had fallen in

a quibbling with swords between himself and his enemy, Robert of Hensdowne. Then they had returned to keep their mother in her old age. Her passing came in peace, as I have said, eight years after.

"It was a woman who came between them, none other than the daughter of Robert of Hensdowne, he who had slain their father. Sybil, she was called, and a woman to truly delight the eye. Sir Michael, being older and of sterner stuff than Bertram, frowned on his attentions to Sybil, saying that as the daughter of their father's enemy she was to be avoided.

"But Bertram vowed that his father had fallen in honorable dispute and that they had no further quarrel with the house of Hensdowne, seeing that its head was also gone on, leaving no one with whom to continue the enmity. For could one wage war on women, than whom there was none left of the line?

"These arguments did not serve to soften Sir Michael's heart, so that at last, when Bertram avowed his intention of taking the lovely Sybil to wife, there arose harsh words between them. The whole thing was told by their old serving man, Rollo, who later died a madman with the memory of it.

"They were great admirers of the game of billiards, at which they were wont to play for hours at a time, and often until late at night. Passers-by on the highroad, a scant score rods from the Hall, often heard the click of the balls and their shouts over a good play.

"It was after they had finished a game one night, and Sir Michael had retired to his bedroom to shave himself, that Bertram chose to tell him of his approaching marriage to the Lady Sybil.

"Sir Michael stood before a glass carefully running the razor over his lean face, as Bertram sat himself in a chair not far off.

" 'Brother,' he said, 'I have news for you, which mayhap will not please you.'

"Sir Michael was a man of keen mind.

" 'Then I would say that it concerned Sybil of Hensdowne, since there is no other thing upon which you could talk to me in a manner displeasing,' he said quickly.

" 'In sooth, that is so,' Bertram replied. 'We are to be wed this very month, the day and the hour already being decided upon.'

"At this point Sir Michael ceased his shaving, though he did not lay aside the razor, and crossed over to stand at Bertram's side.

" 'Bertram,' he said in great wrath, 'an you wed this wench of Hensdowne, I shall disclaim you as brother of mine. Moreover, I shall do everything in my power to prevent your committing so mad a deed. That I swear by the memory of our mother, who would have forbidden it with her last breath.'

" 'Hold your words, Sir Michael!' Bertram shouted, leaping from his chair. 'No man shall name Sybil thus and fail to answer to me for it. I demand that you unsay those words, else you may never be able to prevent our marriage!'

"Sir Michael turned away with a laugh, to resume his shaving, but Bertram turned him about by the shoulder and faced him closely.

" 'Unsay them, I tell you!' he demanded again.

" 'I will not!' Sir Michael declared.

"Then Bertram smote him across the cheek a staggering blow. It was more than Sir Michael could stand, even from his brother, having in his veins blood that was hot and in his nature a temper that flared up quickly though it as quickly died away.

"In a trice he had struck back at Bertram, but alas! he had not laid aside the razor and an unkindly fate caused its blade to sweep fair across his brother's neck!

"Bertram staggered back, grasping his neck, the blood spurting through his fingers in a gory flood. Once he moaned, then fell on the carpet.

"'Oh God!' Sir Michael cried in horror. 'I would not have done it, I swear I would not have done it!'

"In vain were his efforts to stanch the flow. There on the carpet young Bertram coughed out his life through the gaping wound in his neck, and all the cries and pleas and efforts of his brother could not bring it back. It is said that to this very day that awful stain still dyes the carpet where he lay.

"Sir Michael could not tear himself away from the corpse of his brother. For hours he sat on the floor, moaning and tearing his hair, fast losing his grasp of himself. In the end, as the early hours of morning came on, he went stark, staring mad, and slashed his own throat with the same razor, and thus died.

"They were buried side by side in the ground of the chapel where their mother and father were wont to worship. The lovely Sybil quitted England and was never again heard from, though some said she went into a French convent.

"So the old Hall became dark and silent, and when villagers belated in their homeward journeys chanced to pass on the highroad they quickened their steps and did not look upon its gloomy shape.

"Exactly a year later, to the very night on which the awful deaths came about, a villager named Wesley, the same who is now clerk of Sussey, happened on the highroad, being on his way from Minstead. Drawing nigh the Hall he halted in astonishment to see that it was lighted on the ground floor. Listening sharply he was further astounded to hear sounding clear and sharp on the night air, the click of the balls with which the game of billiards is played.

"Now the good Wesley was of stouter heart than most, and being always eager to find a reasonable answer to any question, he made bold to enter the grounds and approach a window which was lower than the rest, letting out upon a terrace. The sight that smote his eyes from within the room forever after cured him of window spying.

"Over the billiard table in the center of the large room, the swinging candelabrum shed a fitful light; yet the flames from the wicks of the tallow dips did not seem to burn, rather glowed with a flickering, cold light that was at once weird and unearthly.

"*At one side of the table, with his stick in hand, stood young Bertram Hadley, watching with great concern the play which Sir Michael Hadley, on the other side, was about to make! And across the throat of each gaped a horrible wound, like a grinning red mouth, while their jackets were gory with their own lifeblood!*

"Stiffened with horror at the spectacle, Wesley stood watching, powerless to depart. For upwards of an hour they played thus, now commending each other at some skilful deed, then arguing with all the fervor of their hot natures. At last, when Wesley was trembling with fright and weakness, they laid their sticks on the table and walked from the room arm in arm. As they departed, the cold light from the candles dimmed and then vanished, and Wesley stood in darkness.

"When he had gained strength enough he fled to the village, chattering with fear, his eyes wide and staring. Hours passed before he could tell what he had seen, and from that day to this he has never been as stout of heart as before.

"Now you know why I say it is a sad thing for these folk so happily wed, to come to that place. It is scarce a fortnight now until the brothers Hadley are like to return for the yearly game at billiards. When they do come, wo be unto him who lives within the walls of Hadley Hall!"

JUST three days later the newly wed couple arrived, together with a goodly staff of servants. In less than three hours after they had first set foot in the Hall the entire village knew that they were Lord Allen Aleys and his lady, the comely Helen.

Lord Aleys' name was well and widely known in that day, for as a member of Parliament his statesmanship had been felt the length and breadth of England, and as a warrior and sportsman he was no less celebrated. The memory of his conduct when for three days and nights he was cut off from his countrymen and besieged by the enemy atop a barren hill still remained fresh in the minds of those who were with him and lived to tell the tale.

For his exploits in the war he had been granted the Victoria Cross and other decorations, yet of his trophies of the hunt, captured in many foreign climes, he was even more proud. Now, while still a young man, having not long before passed his thirty-fifth birthday, he had taken a wife and a noble estate, so that there seemed nothing more needed to make him the happiest man on earth.

He was very nearly that, for life at Hadley Hall promised to be a perfect idyl of love-blest contentment. Months would pass by before he would be called back to London to plunge once more into affairs of state, and the intervening time he planned to spend in quietude with his bride.

Yet he had hardly become settled in the Hall when, on the third day since their arrival, as he was walking in the gardens where workmen were busy restoring their former beauty, he was startled by the sudden appearance from the hedge at his side, of the villager, Hal Wilkerson.

Fumbling his cap in his hands, Hal approached him timidly and uncertainly.

"I—I—your pardon, sir, for coming this way, and startling you. There is something I should tell you and I was afraid I might not get to see you."

"I understand," said Lord Aleys in his kindliest manner, and he had a way of making everyone feel at ease in his presence. "You are from Sussey, I presume?"

"Aye, sir, I be called Hal Wilkerson."

"I see. And what is it you feel you should tell me?"

"Well, you see sir, it has to do with the Hall. It's—it's——"

"Yes, go on, don't be afraid to tell me."

"Well, sir, it's haunted!"

Lord Aleys took on his gravest and most interested attitude.

"I am glad to hear that, for I shall be forearmed," he said. "You are quite sure, I suppose, that it *is* haunted?"

"I know that for a fact, sir," Hal assured him. "It's commonly known here in Sussey. Everyone fears for you and your lady, sir, and we hope you will not try to stay. Please believe me, sir, I wouldn't lie to you, on my soul I wouldn't."

Lord Aleys spent a moment apparently in deep thought.

"Haunted!" he said meditatively. "Well, well! That's unfortunate. But I hardly see how it can be helped now, for I've bought the Hall, you see, and I'd hate to lose the money. It cost me a tidy sum."

"Aye, sir, I've no doubt it did," Hal agreed solemnly, "but is it not better to go with your lives than without them?"

This question piqued his lordship, for he raised his brows and regarded the villager solemnly.

"Do you mean to say our lives are in danger?" he asked sharply.

"Aye, sir, and I fear the time is not far off, either."

"Suppose you tell me just how and why this place is haunted, if you know," Lord Aleys suggested.

Hal complied, and they walked to a stone bench near by, where Lord Aleys took a seat but the villager remained standing, still fumbling his cap and looking still less at ease. It was a nervous business for him, for never before in his life had he addressed such a high and great man.

Still, the courage that caused him to lurk for two hours in the hedge, waiting for a chance to speak, carried him through so that he told the story of the two brothers and of the yearly billiard game with fair clearness. When he had finished, Lord Aleys sat silent for a few minutes, then his face became wreathed with a jolly smile that ended in a hearty laugh.

"I have just thought of something very amusing," he explained to Hal, who marveled that he could laugh after what he had told him.

"You see, I had the Hall done over before I came out," he continued, "and the old billiard table went out with a lot of other rubbish too worn to be of service. Now what do you suppose the amiable brothers will do for a table to play on when they come for their game, as you say they will in a short time?"

"I don't know, sir," the villager replied in all sincerity, "but I think they will find a way to amuse themselves. You'll pardon me for saying it, sir, but I should not wish to be here when they do come!"

With that he made a clumsy bow and walked away to disappear through the hedge, pulling his cap on as he went.

Lord Aleys sat thinking for some minutes before he arose and went toward the Hall.

STRANGELY enough, when Lord Aleys related Hal's story to Lady Helen, she was not inclined to treat it as lightly as he had done. She listened gravely while he told it in a merry humor at the dinner table that night, and when he had concluded she sat staring into space without making any answer. Seeing that, he twitted her, saying, "Come now, sweetest; you aren't going to let this silly village myth disturb you, I hope."

To which she answered, with a queerly mysterious smile and a pat of her hand on his arm, "Allen, I do not consider it altogether a myth. Much of it is history, as you may be surprized to learn. As for their coming back—are you sure they will not be angry at your having removed the billiard table?"

Lord Aleys stepped behind her chair and, leaning over, embraced her.

"Surely you jest," he said lightly. "Do you think a couple of staggering old phantoms can harm me when bullets and tigers have done their worst and come off second best?"

And he laughed cheerily while she continued to stare into space.

CAME the night when, according to the story, the brothers were to return for their phantom game of billiards, and Lord Aleys had quite forgotten the matter. But not so Lady Helen, who was visibly nervous and worried, though her husband did not notice it.

After they had both retired, she sat for a long time in a chair by the wide window of her bedroom, looking out upon the quiet countryside, which was swimming in the silver light of the moon, riding high overhead. She could not sleep. In her heart a name-

less fear tugged and strained, and her mind could not throw off the dread picture her husband's story had penciled there.

Lord Aleys proceeded straight to bed and did not find sleep tardy in possessing his mind and body. In fact, so soundly did he slumber that he was not conscious of any time having passed before he was awakened in an inexplicable manner and sat upright in bed, feeling queerer than he had ever felt before in his whole life.

In his brain there still echoed a call from somewhere, a call that had come in a strange, rattling voice. It was both a call and protest against something. He knew that it concerned him, though his name had not been uttered. Strange thoughts began to run riot through his brain, and these thoughts, try as he might, he could not banish.

In his mental agony a cold sweat popped out on his brow, and his tongue clave to his mouth so that he could not cry out. Then he saw, and at the same time knew.

As if it had stepped out of darkness into light, there appeared in the room, not far from his bed, the figure of a man attired in the costume of many years before. There was about him an indefinable air of unreality. He did not seem materially solid, more as though a great cloud of steam had been pressed and molded to the shape of a man. Yet that was not what actually struck terror to the bold heart of Lord Aleys. *The man's throat had been slashed from ear to ear, and his blood dyed the front of his jacket in hideous splotches!*

As though the appearance of this dread apparition were not horror enough, there came into evidence at his side another figure, that of a younger man, *and his throat, too, was slit, and the wound gaped open so that it grinned ghoulishly at the fear-paralyzed man in the bed!*

The older of the two raised a thin finger to point at Lord Aleys, and there came rattling from his mutilated throat words that made the statesman shiver violently.

"Intruder, encroacher on our happiness, why have you done this thing?" he asked.

"What thing? What have I done?" Lord Aleys queried in the thin voice of an old man.

"Why have you removed the only source of happiness we possessed? Why had you, who could ask nothing more of life, to destroy the only joy that remained to two souls deriving nothing but pain and misery from death?

"Through every hour of the year save one, we wander through an eternity of sorrow and anguish, myself condemned to such, my brother choosing to suffer with me. Now that one hour you have taken away from us. No more may we come here at this time to find respite from our woes.

"Therefore, it is but justice that you, who have destroyed our pleasure, shall join us to taste our pain. You know the manner and the means, now make haste, for we would be gone, seeing that only you detain us!"

It was a sentence, Lord Aleys felt, and every gurgling word and whistling accent burned deep into his soul. The hair on his neck prickled with terror. He tried to cry out but he was dumb. His limbs were as lumps of lead. While he struggled with his weakness of body the figures waited in hideous silence.

LADY HELEN had been unable to coax sleep to drown her unrest, and had remained seated in the chair by the window. How long she had been there she did not know, but she knew that several hours had passed before the nameless fear in her soul crystallized and awoke her to swift action. She arose to her feet trem-

bling, her fine nostrils dilated, and her deep brown eyes wide with apprehension.

Not knowing why nor even wondering, she ran to her door, snatched it open, and raced down the hall toward her husband's bedroom. The door there was not locked, so she had no trouble in gaining speedy entrance. On the threshold she halted as though struck suddenly to stone.

The room was empty save for the form of Lord Aleys, which stood in its exact center. His head was raised so that his face, expressionless as a sphinx, was presented to the ceiling. In his right hand he grasped an open razor which he lifted slowly and with inexorable certainty toward his throat!

Lady Helen stood transfixed with fright until the glittering blade was about to touch his skin, then she rushed forward. With one sweep of her arm she dashed the deadly instrument from his hand, so that it bounded clear across the room and was lost in the darkness. With all her strength she shook her husband's body.

"Allen! Allen!" she cried hysterically.

He opened his eyes, fumbled at his throat, then covered his face with his hands.

"God!—I—Helen! Where are you? Oh! I've seen them! They were here!"

"There has been no one here," she assured him. "You have had a terrible dream, but everything is all right now."

"Yes, I've had a most terrible dream," he replied, "but everything is all right now."

THE next morning she replaced the razor in its cabinet, so that Lord Aleys never knew what awful effect the vision had had upon him, and it is said that peace unbroken descended upon Hadley Hall and that the brothers returned no more, since their pleasure was destroyed and their evil desire had been robbed of its fruits.

WEIRD STORY REPRINTS

*No. 8. The White Dog**

By FEODOR SOLOGUB

EVERYTHING was irksome for Alexandra Ivanovna in the workship of this out-of-the-way town. It was the shop in which she had served as apprentice and now for several years as seamstress. Everything irritated Alexandra Ivanovna; she quarreled with everyone and abused the apprentices. Among others to suffer from her tantrums was Tanechka, the youngest of the seamstresses, who had only recently become an apprentice.

In the beginning Tanechka submitted to her abuse in silence. In the end she revolted, and, addressing her assailant, said quite calmly and affably, so that everyone laughed, "Alexandra Ivanovna, you are a dog!"

Alexandra Ivanovna scowled.

"You are a dog yourself!" she exclaimed.

Tanechka was sitting sewing. She

** Translated from the Russian.*

paused now and then from her work and said, calmly and deliberately, "You always whine . . . you certainly are a dog. . . You have a dog's snout . . . And a dog's ears . . . And a wagging tail . . . The mistress will soon drive you out of doors, because you are the most detestable of dogs—a poodle."

Tanechka was a young, plump, rosy-cheeked girl with a good-natured face which revealed a trace of cunning. She sat there demurely, barefooted, still dressed in her apprentice clothes; her eyes were clear, and her brows were highly arched on her finely curved white forehead, framed by straight dark chestnut hair, which looked black in the distance. Tanechka's voice was clear, even, sweet, insinuating, and if one could have heard its sound only, and not given heed to the words, it would have given the impression that she was paying Alexandra Ivanovna compliments.

The other seamstresses laughed, the apprentices chuckled, they covered their faces with their black aprons and cast side glances at Alexandra Ivanovna, who was livid with rage.

"Wretch!" she exclaimed. "I will pull your ears for you! I won't leave a hair on your head!"

Tanechka replied in a gentle voice: "The paws are a bit short . . . The poodle bites as well as barks . . . It may be necessary to buy a muzzle."

Alexandra Ivanovna made a movement toward Tanechka. But before Tanechka had time to lay aside her work and get up, the mistress of the establishment entered.

"Alexandra Ivanovna," she said sternly, "what do you mean by making such a fuss?"

Alexandra Ivanovna, much agitated, replied, "Irina Petrovna, I wish you would forbid her to call me a dog!"

Tanechka in her turn complained: "She is always snarling at something or other."

But the mistress looked at her sternly and said, "Tanechka, I can see through you. Are you sure you didn't begin it? You needn't think that because you are a seamstress now you are an important person. If it weren't for your mother's sake——"

Tanechka grew red, but preserved her innocent and affable manner. She addressed her mistress in a subdued voice: "Forgive me, Irina Petrovna, I will not do it again. But it wasn't altogether my fault . . ."

ALEXANDRA IVANOVNA returned home almost ill with rage. Tanechka had guessed her weakness.

"A dog! Well, then, I am a dog." thought Alexandra Ivanovna, "but it is none of her affair! Have I looked to see whether she is a serpent or a fox? It is easy to find one out, but why make a fuss about it? Is a dog worse than any other animal?"

The clear summer night languished and sighed. A soft breeze from the adjacent fields occasionally blew down the peaceful streets. The moon rose clear and full, that very same moon which rose long ago at another place, over the broad desolate steppe, the home of the wild, of those who ran free and whined in their ancient earthly travail.

And now, as then, glowed eyes sick with longing; and her heart, still wild, not forgetting in town the great spaciousness of the steppe, felt oppressed; her throat was troubled with a tormenting desire to howl.

She was about to undress, but what was the use? She could not sleep, anyway. She went into the passage. The planks of the floor bent and creaked under her, and small shavings and sand which covered them tickled her feet not unpleasantly.

She went out on the doorstep. There sat the *babushka* Stepanida, a black figure in her black shawl, gaunt and shriveled. She sat with her head

bent, and seemed to be warming herself in the rays of the cold moon.

Alexandra Ivanovna sat down beside her. She kept looking at the old woman sideways. The large curved nose of her companion seemed to her like the beak of an old bird.

"A crow?" Alexandra Ivanovna asked herself.

She smiled, forgetting for the moment her longing and her fears. Shrewd as the eyes of a dog, her own eyes lighted up with the joy of her discovery. In the pale green light of the moon the wrinkles of her faded face became altogether invisible, and she seemed once more young and merry and light-hearted, just as she was ten years ago, when the moon had not yet called upon her to bark and bay of nights before the windows of the dark bathhouse.

She moved closer to the old woman, and said affably, "*Babushka* Stepanida, there is something I have been wanting to ask you."

The old woman turned to her, her dark face furrowed with wrinkles, and asked in a sharp, oldish voice that sounded like a caw, "Well, my dear? Go ahead and ask."

Alexandra Ivanovna gave a repressed laugh; her thin shoulders suddenly trembled from a chill that ran down her spine.

She spoke very quietly: "*Babushka* Stepanida, it seems to me—tell me is it true?—I don't know exactly how to put it—but you, *babushka*, please don't take offense—it is not from malice that I——"

"Go on, my dear, say it," said the old woman, looking at Alexandra Ivanovna with glowing eyes.

"It seems to me, *babushka*—please, now, don't take offense—as if you, *babushka*, were a crow."

The old woman turned away. She nodded her head, and seemed like one who had recalled something. Her head, with its sharply outlined nose, bowed and nodded, and at last it seemed to Alexandra Ivanovna that the old woman was dozing. Dozing, and mumbling something under her nose—nodding and mumbling old forgotten words, old magic words.

An intense quiet reigned out of doors. It was neither light nor dark, and everything seemed bewitched with the inarticulate mumbling of old, forgotten words. Everything languished and seemed lost in apathy.

Again a longing oppressed her heart. And it was neither a dream nor an illusion. A thousand perfumes, imperceptible by day, became subtly distinguishable, and they recalled something ancient and primitive.

In a barely audible voice the old woman mumbled, "Yes, I am a crow. Only I have no wings. But there are times when I caw, and I caw, and tell of wo. And I am given to forebodings, my dear; each time I have one I simply must caw. People are not particularly anxious to hear me. And when I see a doomed person I have such a strong desire to caw."

The old woman suddenly made a sweeping movement with her arms, and in a shrill voice cried out twice: "Kar-r, Kar-r!"

Alexandra Ivanovna shuddered, and asked, "*Babushka*, at whom are you cawing?"

"At you, my dear," the old woman answered. "I am cawing at you."

It had become too painful to sit with the old woman any longer. Alexandra Ivanovna went to her own room. She sat down before the open window and listened to two voices at the gate.

"It simply won't stop whining!" said a low and harsh voice.

"And uncle, did you see?" asked an agreeable young tenor.

Alexandra Ivanovna recognized in this last the voice of the curly-headed, freckled-faced lad who lived in the same court.

A brief and depressing silence followed. Then she heard a hoarse and

harsh voice say suddenly. "Yes, I saw. It's very large—and white. It lies near the bathhouse, and bays at the moon."

The voice gave her an image of the man, of his shovel-shaped beard, his low, furrowed forehead, his small, piggish eyes, and his spread-out fat legs.

"And why does it bay, uncle?" asked the agreeable voice.

And again the hoarse voice did not reply at once.

"Certainly to no good purpose—and where it came from is more than I can say."

"Do you think, uncle, it may be a *werewolf?*" asked the agreeable voice.

"I should not advise you to investigate," replied the hoarse voice.

She could not quite understand what these words implied, nor did she wish to think of them. She did not feel inclined to listen further. What was the sound and significance of human words to her?

The moon looked straight into her face and persistently called her and tormented her. Her heart was restless with a dark longing, and she could not sit still.

ALEXANDRA IVANOVNA quickly undressed herself. Naked, all white, she silently stole through the passage; she then opened the outer door (there was no one on the step or outside) and ran quickly across the court and the vegetable garden, and reached the bathhouse. The sharp contact of her body with the cold air and her feet with the cold ground gave her pleasure. But soon her body was warm.

She lay down in the grass, on her stomach. Then, raising herself on her elbows, she lifted her face toward the pale, brooding moon, and gave a long-drawn-out whine.

"Listen, uncle, it is whining," said the curly-haired lad at the gate.

The agreeable tenor voice trembled perceptibly.

"Whining again, the accurst one!" said the hoarse, harsh voice slowly.

They rose from the bench. The gate latch clicked.

They went silently across the courtyard and the vegetable garden, the two of them. The older man, black-bearded and powerful, walked in front, a gun in his hand. The curly-headed lad followed tremblingly, and looked constantly behind.

Near the bathhouse, in the grass, lay a huge white dog, whining piteously. Its head, black on the crown, was raised to the moon, which pursued its way in the cold sky; its hind legs were strangely thrown backward, while the front ones, firm and straight, pressed hard against the ground.

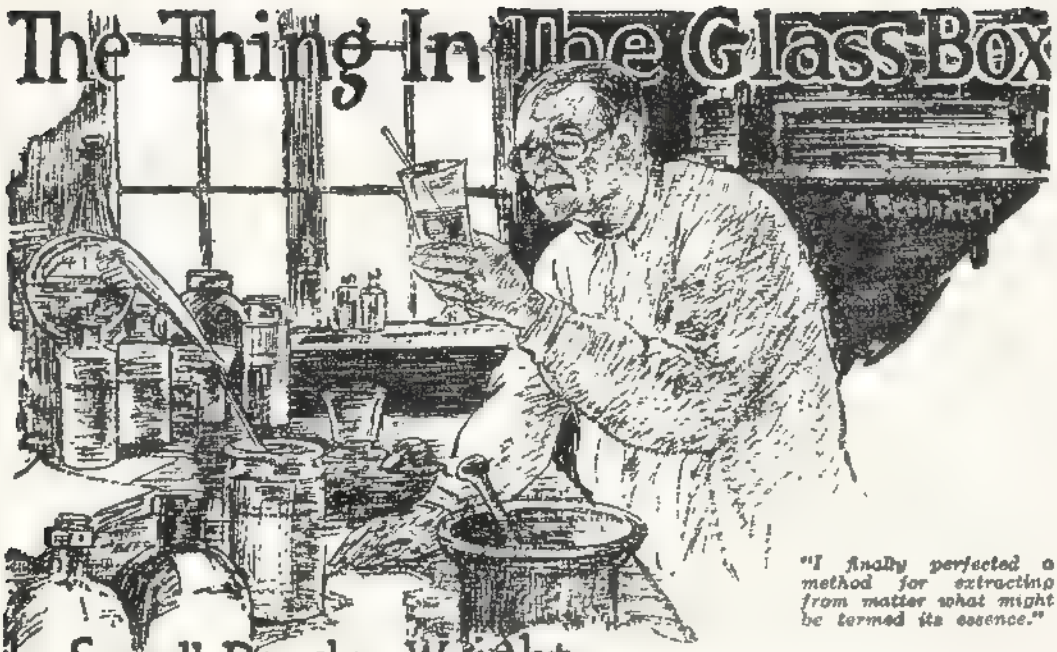
In the pale green and unreal light of the moon it seemed enormous. So huge a dog was surely never seen on earth. It was thick and fat. The black spot, which began at the head and stretched in uneven strands down the entire spine, seemed like a woman's loosened hair. No tail was visible; presumably it was turned under. The fur on the body was so short that in the distance the dog seemed wholly naked, and its hide shone dimly in the moonlight, so that altogether it resembled the body of a nude woman, who lay in the grass and bayed at the moon.

The man with the black beard took aim. The curly-haired lad crossed himself and mumbled something.

The discharge of a rifle sounded in the night air. The dog gave a groan, jumped up on its hind legs, became a naked woman, who, her body covered with blood, started to run, all the while groaning, weeping and raising cries of distress.

The black-bearded one and the curly-haired one threw themselves in the grass, and began to moan in wild terror.

The Thing In The Glass Box



"I finally perfected a method for extracting from matter what might be termed its essence."

by Sewell Peaslee Wright

I WAS up in northern Ontario, eighty miles from the nearest town or railroad, when the story broke. It wasn't until it was all over that I struck civilization and this headline:

ARVIN, MYSTERY MURDERER, FOUND INSANE.

All the details followed. Gene Arvin, my little, mild-mannered, rather eccentric old chemistry professor, had been found in the wreck of what had once been his laboratory, mumbling over the dead body of James Winters, who had been his assistant.

Arvin had admitted the killing, but had refused to say more than that. How the man was killed was a mystery that baffled physicians. There were no marks whatever of violence on the body, and no trace of poison could be detected. Every means to make Arvin speak of the murder had failed, although on all other subjects he talked freely and rationally.

The news stunned me, for only a few years back Arvin had been one of my dreaded and at the same time most respected professors in the university. I was far from being a smart pupil in his classes, but there had sprung up between us a real friendship. I dropped everything to get to him in his time of trouble; I knew he had no kin and but few friends, and that I would be welcome indeed.

Fortunately my father has some influence with the powers that be in our state, and he managed to arrange for me a private interview with the condemned man. It happened that there had been some delay in making out his commitment papers, because of some obscure technicality, and so he was still in his cell.

I was startled by the change in the man. His spare figure was more gaunt than ever; the hair that had been but lightly sprinkled with gray when I had seen him last was snow-white now. The kindly, shrewd old face was lined and seamed with a hundred pain-wrinkles that added decades to his age. Only his eyes seemed to have retained their old life,

and even they were blood-shot with sleeplessness.

When greetings were over—and it chokes me even now to think how the old man greeted me when the guard ushered me into the little narrow cell—Arvin brought the conversation around to the subject that was naturally uppermost in the minds of us both.

"Peter, you have come because you, as a friend, wanted to hear from my own lips that I am not guilty of that with which I am charged. I prayed that someone at least of my friends might prove loyal, might not be ready to believe the worst against me—and so I have waited. All I ask is that you do not interrupt me. Do you agree?"

"Surely," I nodded.

He picked up a tumbler two-thirds full of a milky, cloudy liquid, studied it carefully, and then smiled thoughtfully across at me. Without a word he drained the glass, grimacing.

"Evil-tasting medicine," he commented. "And now for the story.

"You would probably not understand if I went into details regarding the work Jim and I have been doing for the past six years. Suffice to say that we were working along lines far in advance of anything of which there is any record, dealing with the wonders of matter; its composition, decomposition and structure, with particular reference to animal tissue.

"Briefly, working together day and night, Jim and I finally perfected a method for extracting from matter what might be termed its essence; just as a chemist makes a highly concentrated solution that may represent in a thimbleful the essential parts of ten thousand gallons of liquid.

"Our first experiment on a living object brought to me the greatest thrill of my life. A guinea pig was clamped to a glass plate and a glass bell placed over him. The current was turned on (our apparatus was, as you might guess, electrical in nature) and with anxious eyes we watched the result.

"Imagine the picture, Pete. You are familiar with the big, high-ceilinged room that served me as a laboratory. Around the walls the shadowy masses of our experimental equipment; at the far end the gleaming glass of the chemical apparatus, the stained and eroded hood under which we performed experiments in which poisonous fumes were emitted.

"In one corner a motor generator whined weirdly, developing the direct current needed by the apparatus; aside from that, not a sound save our excited breathing broke the stillness of the big, ungainly room.

"The only light came from a shaded lamp so constructed that all its light was concentrated in one spot, and this intense beam rested upon the white body of the guinea pig. A ray of orange light, that slowly faded into a pale lemon color as the current was increased, sprang from our apparatus, bathing the body of the unfortunate rodent in its intense energy. It shone through the white light of the lamp as distinctly as though it had been a bar of incandescent metal—which indeed it was, in a manner of speaking, although that touches upon scientific detail that you, Peter, would never understand.

"Above the glass bell hung a huge disk, some four feet in diameter and nearly a foot thick. On its lower face were innumerable cylindrical projections, around the edges of which played tiny purplish coronas. Oh, the scene was weird enough to fit very nicely into some of those interesting but highly improbable stories you write, Peter.

"Eagerly we watched as the current was increased. The ray faded

from lemon to light straw. The motor generator in the corner hummed with a deeper note as the load increased.

"'It's about time, Jim,' I remarked, and even as I spoke a wraith seemed to detach itself from the little body clamped to the table. The struggling little victim ceased moving. At the top of the bell something like a faint wisp of smoke, so attenuated as to be formless, moved incessantly. Below it, cast on the table by the streaming light, was a clearly-defined shadow—the shadow of a leaping, struggling guinea pig!

"Peter, perhaps you too will find it impossible of belief, but we had extracted from that little animal not only its counterpart in essential form, but the spark of life itself! The gross body of the subject was dead; the life had fled with the elemental counterpart that we had subtracted.

"The experiment now was but half completed. Quickly we introduced into the bell a heavy vapor that collected on the sides of the bell in tiny blood-red beads. All the other apparatus was turned off; the room was as quiet as the grave save for the slight hiss of the escaping gas and our own hard breathing.

"It was only a few seconds before the vapory form at the top of the bell began to become more distinct. Gradually it sank to the bottom, so that its scampering feet joined with the flying feet of its shadow.

"Rapidly it took form, until in less than three minutes there were two identical guinea pigs inside the bell; one, the original one, dead; the other, the created one, alive and active! It was as if we had extracted the salt out of Salt Lake, leaving it to all appearances just the same as ever, and then taken the salt to some great depression, poured in water enough, and made another Salt Lake. The dead guinea pig represented the lake with the salt extracted; the wraith that had floated at the top of the bell, the salt. The gas, which contained the elements which were not extracted from the body of the dead rodent, represented the water. The analogy is perhaps crude, but to one who never got better grades in chemistry and physics than you did, I am afraid it is the best explanation I can give.

"Frankly, we had not expected to extract life. We expected that the extraction process would kill the first animal, and that we would be able to reproduce but another identical and lifeless animal. We tried the experiment over and over again, and found the results always the same.

"One peculiar thing was this: the wraith (I call it that for lack of a better name) seemed to have all the normal intelligence of the animal from which it came. We tried the experiment on several animals that had been trained to do tricks, and by watching their shadows we determined that at the usual command they performed their tricks as well as when they were in their original form. Which, after all, was not so surprizing, for thought and memory are things above matter, even though material blood and gray matter are necessary adjuncts of the mental processes.

"All this was two years ago. We said nothing of our discovery. In its present form, it was of no value to the world; we still had to discover a practical application for it; something that would make it useful instead of merely wonderful.

"It was Jim who had the nerve at last to formulate in words the thought that had possessed both of us for months.

"'We must build a bell big enough, make disintegrating and extracting apparatus powerful enough, and try our great experiment on a human being,' he announced quietly, one night. 'And I volunteer for the position of subject!'

"For a moment I did not reply. I knew that only through some such experiment could we make our discovery of practical value, if practical value it had. And Jim, with his scientific knowledge, would undoubtedly make the ideal subject.

"'You understand the risks?' I asked.

"'Surely. I understand the risk of crossing a street, too; the risk of eating anything that comes from a can; the risk of breathing the germ-crowded air of the city—and yet I do all these things. The animals that we have experimented upon are all strong and healthy, none the worse for their experience. There's nothing to worry about; let's start tomorrow on the new apparatus we'll need!'

"His statement seemed to be true at every point. I did not argue with him. We just shook hands silently, and the next day we did start on the new apparatus.

"It took us nearly a year to finish it, but at last it was finished. It was an exact counterpart of the smaller experimental apparatus, save that instead of a glass bell we had a large glass box, made from the heaviest plate glass, cemented at the edges, and bound together at the corners with heavy copper bosses. This crystal box was some seven feet long, four feet wide, and nearly five feet tall. A section of the top was arranged so that it could be slid out, making a sort of trap-door.

"The time came for the big experiment. 'Remember,' said Jim as he prepared himself, 'you are to keep the slide in the top of the box closed until I signal you to open it. I don't know whether I'll have any strength or means of locomotion; perhaps I'll go straight up like a hydrogen-filled toy balloon. If I find I can navigate all right, I'll signal you, and then you can open the slide and I will see what I can do in the attenuated state.

"'Just think,' went on Jim, 'if I can propel myself through the air with the speed that seems likely, think of what it would mean to our country in time of war! We could reduce our men here, send them to the far ends of the world without the usual trouble of securing transportation, food and so forth, and then reform them near the point where they were needed!'

"Stripped to the buff he rolled under one side of the glass box as I tilted it, and lay smiling up at me from the heavy crystal floor. Quickly I threw on the switch that started the motor generator, and its crescendo whine filled the laboratory with a weird melody. Putting out all lights save the one, I turned on the power in both the disintegrating and the extracting apparatus.

"The powerful orange ray seemed to flow into his body, warming it to incandescence. He smiled up at me, nodding slightly. It was useless for him to speak, however, for the big glass box was nearly sound-proof. The brush discharge around the projections on the disk above streamed and wavered, making a slight crackling sound that now and then was audible above the singing of the generator in the corner.

"Slowly I increased the power, listening to the deeper note of the generator as it labored more and more under the increasing load. The ray faded from orange to yellow, from yellow to lemon, from lemon to pale straw. Still Jim watched me from the floor of the box, the same slight smile playing around his lips. His eyes held the alert, intelligent look of a man who expectantly awaits something desirable. I knew that nothing had happened, for the effect of the ray did not seem to be cumulative. A certain point had to be reached, and then the action took place almost instantly.

"I increased the power still more. The generator in the corner grumbled and vibrated. The light of the ray paled until it became barely visible. My eyes I kept glued on the prostrate figure in the bottom of the crystal box. If nothing happened now, we would have to build more powerful apparatus; I had loosed the full power available.

"But we had calculated wisely. Even as I looked the smile left Jim's face, and the look in his eyes changed horribly. One instant they were looking calmly up at me; the next moment they were filled with all the agony of the damned. The lips writhed, quivered, fluttered still. The eyes rolled upward and took on a glassy look. Startled, horrified, I stood there.

"A gray, formless something drifted from the now rigid body and floated to the top of the glass box. I looked down at the shadow it cast. On the floor was the clear-cut, sprawling shadow of a man. Even as I looked, the shadow hands rose above the head, and then slowly came back to the sides. It was the signal that all was well; that the essence-body could navigate of its own volition. Quickly I pulled back the slide in the top of the box, and the swirling gray form slipped out and I caught occasional glimpses of it as it flitted with amazing rapidity along the ceiling. I switched on one of the big ceiling domes, and instantly the black sprawling shadow of a man flashed diagonally along one wall.

"I walked over and threw wide one of the big windows of the laboratory. It was our plan that Jim should remain free in the essence state for twenty-four hours and then return to the laboratory, be re-formed, and report on his experiences. Then, if he had been as successful as we confidently expected, we would break the news of our astounding discovery to the scientific world not just as a marvelous experiment, but as a discovery of real practical value."

ARVIN, who up until now had recited his story with a calmness that was all the more remarkable in view of the undoubted weirdness of his tale, seemed suddenly filled with wild and uncontrollable excitement. He rose from the bench upon which he had been seated, and started pacing back and forth violently. His usually mild eyes shone with an unholy glare, and his voice, as he continued, vibrated with emotion.

"That was our plan, Peter. But it didn't work out. Fate had a joker up her sleeve, and she played it just as the winnings seemed surely ours. But I'm going too fast. Let me go back.

"I did not sleep much that night. You can imagine that I wouldn't; my mind was far too full of anticipation. Here was my assistant abroad in the air; invisible, evidently capable of mobility, in possession of all his faculties—imagine the possibilities of the principle we had discovered! In peace, in war, in industry! No wonder I tossed restlessly, and awaited the coming of the dawn with open eyes.

"The next day was a typical late autumn offering; dull, overcast, and with a sharp, raw wind outside that whistled and shrieked in the bare limbs of the trees, and sent the dead leaves whirling and whispering against the side of the house. It seemed as though dark would never come.

"But at last, night did fall. The rain that had been threatening all day came with it; an icy, driving rain that drummed and battered at the windows, and flung itself in wind-driven sprays across the roof. The big elms outside moaned and tossed their naked arms as though in distress, and now and again a flash of distant lightning, unusual for the time of

year, flickered uncertainly on the horizon.

"I bustled around in the laboratory getting everything ready. Three great glass tanks of the re-forming gas, all fitted with nozzles, cocks, and tubing had been prepared, and these I moved near the glass box, at the same time avoiding, as much as possible, glancing at the still figure on the floor. There was something uncanny, horrible, in the sprawled body, and I resolved that even before Jim related his adventures, we would get rid of that *other self*.

"I glanced at my watch. It was a few minutes of the time. Noting that the glass trap-door in the top of the crystal box was still open, I pulled down one of the big windows and stood quickly to one side to avoid the icy rain that, wind-whipped, came pouring in. The shade slatted in the wind, cracking sharply and tugging at the roller, but I paid no heed. Eagerly I watched for the coming of a shadow.

"It came at last, Peter. Something that moved with lightning quickness, something so intangible as to be invisible except when in motion flashed in at the window, and an instant later the shadow of a man appeared on the floor, darted madly around the room, changing in size and proportions as the light played with it, and finally came to rest on the floor of the glass box. Jim had returned and was sitting beside the body of his other self, inside the crystal walls!

"I slid the trap-door shut, and saw that it was securely sealed. The tube from one of the big tanks of re-forming gas I quickly introduced into the tank, and in a moment my trembling hands had turned on the valve that allowed the big bottle to empty its contents into the glass box.

"Eagerly I watched. The red gas swirled and circled, and the little bloodlike beads formed on the sides of the glass. Slowly, very slowly, I began to make out the form of the man whose dead body lay supine on the glass floor. He was sitting quietly, his knees drawn up and his arms wrapped around his legs, watching.

"The red gas eddied and boiled, and gradually I began to make out Jim's features. Or did I? *Did I?* Could that be Jim? No! It was not Jim, and yet—God help us both! it could be, it was, no one else!"

Arvin's voice broke for the first time, and he stopped abruptly and faced me, his haggard, blood-shot eyes boring into me. I said nothing; I was determined not to break my promise not to interrupt him.

Suddenly he started his nervous pacing again.

"It was Jim, but not the Jim I had worked with, not the Jim I knew. In body, the same; but the face was the face of a demon, a beast—and yet Jim's face, too. I can't tell you what was changed. It was just the light in the eyes, the curl of the lips, the flare of the nostrils. . . .

"I suppose *it*—I can't call it Jim—caught my horrified gaze, for it leered up at me through the swirling red gas. Its white teeth gleamed in a hellish smile, and its flaming eyes transfixed me. Slowly it rose to its feet. With a queer, stoop-shouldered, loose-jointed gait, it came close to the glass where I stood, its smoldering eyes glaring into mine.

"Startled, frightened, I fell back. The effect on the thing inside the glass box was electric. Its lips flew back in a bestial snarl, and with clutching, taloned hands it sprang toward me!

"The heavy plate glass side of the box stopped the leap. The body thudded lightly against the glass; not as a human body would have struck, but softly, as though a cotton bat had been tossed against the glass. The body had not absorbed enough of the re-forming gas to give it either great strength or much solidity.

"Still snarling, the thing picked itself up and leaped time and again against the smooth, transparent barrier. Froth came to its lips, and the staring eyes gleamed red with horrible hate.

"I cowered back against a table, my head reeling. What had happened? It had not changed the animals, and we had experimented on hundreds. They were exactly the same in the re-formed state as in the original. Why, then, had Jim changed so terribly? What was the dif——

"Suddenly the hellish truth came to me! It struck to the center of my understanding like a demolishing thunderbolt. We could extract the essence of a body, and by later supplying those parts left in the original body, create a duplicate. We could even take from the first body the spark of life, and plant it in the new body. We had proved all that on hundreds of animals; proved it beyond question or the shadow of a doubt.

"But in our concentration upon science, we had forgotten something greater, Peter; we had forgotten God! We could not control the soul! When the spark of life fled from the body, the soul—or call it what you will; don't raise your eyebrows because I call it a soul; it is that particle of divinity that is in us all, and that is enough!—left also. But it did not go into the wraith we had extracted from the old body. Where it went is a matter for theologians, not scientists. But it was because the soul had fled that *something*, and not Jim, stood staring out at me with blood-lusting eyes!

"There was only one thing to do, and I did it. As quickly as I could I turned off the hissing red gas, for with the re-forming process going on, it would be only a few minutes before Jim would be strong enough to batter his way out of the glass box, and then God only could foretell what would happen.

"I turned on the disintegrating apparatus, and as the orange ray cut through the bloody fumes in the glass box, the gas disappeared as though by magic. I played the ray upon the *thing* and saw it gradually thin into invisibility.

"In that state it was harmless. I drew open the slide, and it sprang out and started darting around the room. It did not try to attack me; only with the coming of the flesh did it seem to hate. I drew down a window. For the instant there was a lull in the storm; a moment of silence. The shadow swam across the floor, came to rest beside my own. A voice, like the voice of a man a thousand miles away, came very softly to my ear.

" 'You are right. Good-bye!' whispered the voice. It was Jim's voice; low, mournful, regretful, tender.

"The shadow moved, flitted along the casement, disappeared. The storm crashed into life again, and a stinging rain came through the open window. Hastily I flung up the sash.

"On the floor of the glass box lay, to all intents and purposes, the dead body of James Winters. Outside, somewhere, in space, was part of that body, and the vital spark of life. And somewhere, Peter, was the soul of James Winters—*and I could not bring the three together!*

"They say that for a short time my mind became unbalanced. The police came and arrested me in the midst of a room filled with the shattered remains of what had once been scientific apparatus. They found the body of James Winters. They accused me of killing him. Naturally I could not deny it. In a way, I *had* killed him. They tried to make me confess, to tell why I did it, but rather than tell the truth and submit to the jeers and ridicule of men who could not and would not under-

stand, I maintained a stubborn silence. They have condemned me to live for the rest of my life among insane criminals—me! But I am not going. I have already taken the poison that buys me freedom—did the fools think they could keep a chemist like myself from making a poison?"

I started up, but he restrained me with a glance.

"It is useless, Peter. Inside the hour I shall be dead. I am in agony now. You had better leave, I think. But later, after I am gone, I wish you to tell the world; not that it matters, perhaps, but still, I should like some of those who knew me to know that I did not die the murderer of a friend!"

The blood-shot eyes blazed into my own as I arose. My brain was seething. I offered my hand, and he took it in a firm grasp.

"Good-bye, Peter!" he said softly. "I know that what I have told you taxes your belief. But try to believe —try!"

I do not know what answer I should have made if I had not looked up just then.

Through the grated window drifted something like a vagrant wisp of pale smoke. It disappeared almost before I saw it. Then suddenly a shadow stalked across the barred rectangle of sunlight that fell upon the floor.

Neither Arvin nor I had moved. There was not a soul in sight. And yet with my own eyes I saw that shadow walk across the patch of light!

Arvin's glance had followed mine. Despite his pain, his lips curved in an indulgent, inquiring smile.

I turned and called to the guard. Then as his hastening footsteps sounded outside, I glanced back at Arvin.

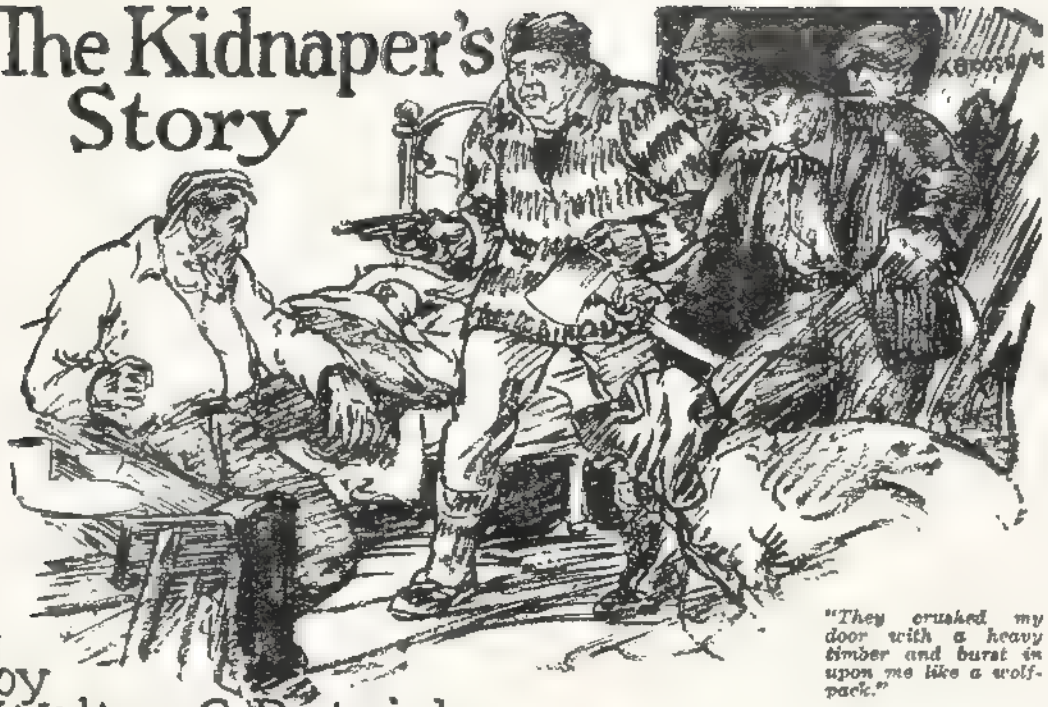
"I believe!" I said softly.

Italian Love

***By* WILLIAM JAMES PRICE**

For months Gambetta and De Angelo
Had quarreled, as good friends will sometimes do,
About a pretty vixen whom they knew;
While she her hand on neither would bestow.
Soon jealousy to hate began to grow,
Until one evening on the avenue
Gambetta with a knife his rival slew,
And must a trial for murder undergo.
Now comes a young Italian from the west
Whom neither man before had heard about.
For him the girl a passion has confessed;
And soon the priest will marry them, no doubt.
But why were other loves to her a jest?
Is life a candle, thus to be blown out?

The Kidnaper's Story



"They crushed my door with a heavy timber and burst in upon me like a wolf-pack."

by Walter G. Detrick

THIS is the story of the once notorious man-wolf. He is a real personage, and he now lives among a colony of very illustrious folk—poets, doctors, artists, musicians and other notables; all, alas, like himself subjected to grievous restraint.

In my first encounter with him I was dusting the corridor that led to the den, when I noticed that his door was no longer shut. In fact it was opening, not as doors usually open, but was swinging inward on noiseless hinges with a movement as regular and as imperceptible as that of the hour hand on a clock.

I worked industriously, feigning unconcern, lest I frighten him back into his lair, for I had a great desire to see this most noted guest of the nation's most exclusive madhouse.

In a little while a bearded face set with unnaturally bright eyes appeared in the doorway; and after a long survey which included me and all my surroundings down to the last speck on the walls, the wolf slunk out to meet me.

There was little of the wolf about him at this time. In truth he had the fawning, cringing manner of a setter that has been cruelly beaten. He had once been of more than average stature, but now he was pathetically bowed and shrunken as if all virtue had gone out of him.

In common with most of those who had read of his sensational escapades I believed he was here in order to escape the stern punishment of the law, and I was expecting to see something new in human depravity. What I did see, however, was the exact opposite, and my prejudices and fixed notions were so firmly rooted that I could scarcely believe that this cowering, stricken thing was the once fearsome wolf.

There was nothing gross or sensual about this man whose name had lately been a hissing and a byword for a nation; instead the seamed and lined

features wore a look of immortal pain, and in his deep-set eyes there was a look of fear—an intense torturing fear.

"Are you the new attendant?" he asked with the deprecatory air of one who seeks a great favor.

"I am, sir. What can I do for you?" I replied, seeking to put the man at ease.

"My name is J———," he said, glancing about with his hunted, furtive look. "As soon as I heard your step in the hall I knew that you were a stranger. Now, you won't disturb me? You won't come near my door, will you?"

I tried to reassure him, but fear had bitten too deeply for mere words to be of avail. He kept repeating:

"Now if you were just to tap on my door I should be unable to sleep at all. Oh, what shall I do?"

Asking the same questions over and over, he clung to me until his gripping hands tore my clothing. My promises only served to increase his excitement, and in the end I was compelled to resort to harsh measures to rid myself of him.

This scene was re-enacted time after time during the months that I was in charge of the "menagerie", as his apartments were called. In time I grew to know him better, perhaps, than anyone else ever did, and what follows is his own story of the sensational kidnaping case in which he figured. Owing to his mental agitation his writings were at times jumbled and incoherent. I have had to make some changes and alterations, but for the most part this is his story just as it came to me.

Mad he undoubtedly was, and is; but I hope that the reading of this, his own version of his tragic and unhappy career, may cause at least a few to remember the exhortation of the great apostle which ends with the words: "And the greatest of these is charity."

A MADMAN'S MANUSCRIPT.

I DRINK the dregs and lees of life—gall and wormwood fill me to my fingertips. Good God! when I think of what I am and of what I should have been I could beat the hard walls and rave and scream. "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find," are the words of the Book. I sought seclusion, rest and peace of mind. I found confusion, kicks, blows, false accusations and a prison cell. I must be calm, however, and not let the gall and bitterness creep into my writing.

Today not more than a score of people know of my existence, or care, but a few years ago lurid tales of my misdoings were crowding kings and councilors off the front pages of the press and my name was known from ocean to ocean. I, who had always been kindly and well-disposed toward all living creatures, suddenly found myself pictured as a being too cruel and too depraved to claim kinship with the human species. If I am remembered at all it will be as a grisly monster with a thirst for human blood. I have neither hope nor desire to redeem myself in the opinion of a world of which I have ceased to be a part, but I am writing this sketch of my life in the hope of speeding a few dragging hours.

I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. In other words my parents had wealth and a leading station in life. Secure against want, I might have lived a life of idle pleasure-seeking, but I strove mightily to add to the talents given to me.

I have been a student since early childhood and there are but few of the arts in which I have not dabbled, but my love for music amounted to a passion. My ambition was to become a great composer. Years of patient toil, however, brought me only indifferent success. Dreams of harmonies filled my soul, creative vapors surged through my brain, but when I tried

to put them into tangible form they became as sounding brass or as tinkling cymbals.

My parents died when I was still a boy, and to my shame be it said that I scarcely noticed their passing. I buried myself in myself and followed the will-o'-the wisp with more zeal than before. Unremitting devotion to a single object turned my instincts from their normal course, and my fellow creatures began to jar unbearably on me. Most people are unhappy when alone, but another human being under the same roof with me drove my thoughts into confusion and rendered me acutely miserable. This is the reason that at the age of twenty-nine I was living the life of a recluse.

In northwestern Pennsylvania a pretty little river flows for a hundred miles or more through an unbroken wilderness. Inch by inch the busy stream has cut a gorge hundreds of feet deep through the rock of the Appalachian Plateau. On each hand the sides of this gorge slope sharply upward for three or four miles and then merge into the flat tableland above. No railroad has ever been built along the river's winding course. The blue haze that shrouds its hills in fair weather is undefiled by coal smoke. A generation ago the lumbermen denuded this region of its magnificent timber, but it is now covered with a young forest and is almost as wild and untrodden as in the days of the red Indian. Pretty hamlets sit on the edge of the defile, but far below, the river still flows free and untrammeled through a ribbon of green.

It was in this solitude that I chose to live. I found a log cabin built by some dead and forgotten pioneer. It stood on a shelf or bench of flat land about twenty feet above the river's brink. Above it a spring gushed forth in a cold, crystal-clear stream; below it the river played clarion over its rocky bed. All things considered, it was an ideal spot. The cabin was in a sad state of disrepair and the creeping wilderness had claimed the few acres of cleared land that had once surrounded it, but these things worried me not at all. I purchased the place, and by spending money freely I soon had a very creditable habitation indeed.

I will pass lightly over the details of my housekeeping because I have a different sort of tale to tell. I hired people to come from the nearest village and perform the menial work about the place, but I insisted that all such work should be finished in the daytime. It was suggested that I have a telephone installed, but I would as soon have slept with a ticking infernal machine by my side. The only living creature that I kept near me was a horse on which I was accustomed to take long rides. The forest, however, teemed with wild things who were never intrusive, and I soon began to take a keen interest in the lives of these lesser people.

I came to my cabin in March and for a time I found the new life very satisfying. I had my books and my piano for company, and when these palled there was the forest, which has always something new to offer him who has eyes that see.

Here, I thought, I have at last found rest, freedom from intrusion and an opportunity to work; here I will find the quiet that my soul craves. Destiny, however, is often at variance with the little plans of men, and while I was indulging in my dream of ease the gods of chance were preparing a rude awakening for me.

I THINK I had been living in my new home for about six weeks when there occurred the first of a series of events which were to lead to my undoing. For some time I had been unable to sleep well, and although I could find no tangible evi-

dence of the presence of an intruder I had an uneasy feeling that someone was prowling about my premises. Unable to concentrate on my work, I decided to go for a long ride in the woods. The month was May and the young forest was a delightful place.

About five miles from my cabin was a steep cone-shaped hill of jagged rock. In summer it was carefully avoided by the straggling berry-pickers and others who at times came to this part of the forest. This was because it was the home of numbers of the dreaded diamond rattlesnakes. On warm days, their scaly lengths outstretched on the gray rocks, they would bask in the sunshine; and wo' to the luckless foot that disturbed their repose! Man has no more horrific foe than the great crotalus.

By some strange freak I have inherited none of the common ancestral dread of serpents. These evil things with cold unearthly eyes sent no shivers of fear coursing down my spine, and I in turn could come very near them without causing that whir of rattles which according to an Indian proverb is more eloquent than a medicine man. Such an affinity between a member of the human family and the primal enemy, while rare, is not unknown, and I gave it but little thought; but in the end it was destined to have a prominent part in the misfortune that was to befall me.

On the morning of my eventful ride I followed a bridle path which led very close to this mount of evil renown; and then dismounting and tying my horse in an open space I began to clamber over the dangerous rocks, feeling my way with a long staff. I could not think of any spy having the temerity to follow me into this venom-guarded wilderness, but as I walked slowly up the steep path the sensation of being dogged by something malign and elusive grew stronger than ever. In a short time I heard a real trampling and a shuffling, and putting aside a screen of bushes I beheld a strange sight.

A stockily built young fellow was standing on a flat rock some distance below me. I could not get a good view of his face, but I noticed that he tallied closely with me in height as well as in other physical characteristics. He was so engrossed in some occupation that he had not noticed me, and it was some time before I comprehended what he was doing. Then I saw that he was tormenting a huge rattler with a long rod, cleverly avoiding the reptile's vicious lunges. Round and round like a toreador in the arena moved the man, the huge serpent thrashing after him. When he paused, the snake would coil, sound his rattles and then strike at the rod in blind rage.

When he had at last tormented his snakeship into such a frenzy that he would no longer try to come to close quarters, but remained in a springy hissing coil, striking aimlessly at whatever was thrown in front of him. the man drew from his pocket a ball made from some tuberous root through which he had thrust long thorns. He fastened this to the end of the rod and held it temptingly before the enraged serpent, who struck at it viciously and then began to show signs of great discomfort. The thorny pellet had become wedged between his flexible jaws and the end of that snake would not be a pleasant one.

Of all created things a snake is about the last to arouse normal human sympathy, but the man had gone about the cruel performance in a cold-blooded manner that repelled me; and I was thus all the more unprepared for the revelation that was to follow.

The snake gave a mighty wriggle and flopped off the rock, the thorns still worrying its jaws, and just then the stranger turned and beheld me standing above him. For the first time I was able to get a good view

of his face, and the sight caused me considerable chagrin.

I have a fairly good acquaintance with myself through observing my face in the glass when shaving and at other times, and here confronting me was my double. A close observer might have noted that his eyes were closer together and that the whole physiognomy was fiercer, but to the casual eye we were as alike as the proverbial two peas. I saw nothing flattering in the fantastic mirror into which I gazed. The stranger regarded me with a cold, unblinking stare in which there was something of the malignity of the snake; and as I looked into that countenance so like, and yet, I trust, so unlike my own, I knew that between us there could be neither quarter nor compromise.

During the whole encounter not a word had been spoken, and I do not know how long we might have stood dumbly staring at each other had not the tableau been broken in an unexpected manner. Close by his feet scurried a frightened rabbit. With a cat-quick pounce he caught the fragile little animal, and turning so that he again faced me he proceeded to rend it with his teeth after the manner of a bloodthirsty wild beast.

The utter fiendishness of this last act of cruelty broke the spell that had held me motionless, and I sprang toward him, but with a mocking laugh he ran away from me and disappeared mysteriously among the thick brush. Search as I might I could not find him, and at length, weary and puzzled, I sought my horse and rode slowly home. I gave a sigh of relief when I saw the friendly walls of my cabin looming up ahead of me; but it was within those walls that I was to receive another of those beastly surprizes of which the day had already been so well filled, for as I proceeded to make my evening toilet I found that my face and hands were smeared with blood!

There is much in life that it were wise to accept as being so without asking why, whence or wherefore. A little later events were to teach me much concerning the fallibility of human reason; but now I set about devising a rational explanation for my red hands. In my plunge through the underbrush I had received a few slight scratches, but it was passing strange that these should have bled so profusely.

It was with a sadly troubled mind that I at length sought my couch, and from this time my contentment was gone. During the day I thought of my impish double almost constantly; dreams of him filled my nights with terror. These dreams were usually vague things in which the identity of the stranger became mixed with that of the evil one himself, but there was one dream that was startlingly vivid.

I was a soldier in some medieval battle. I stood in a ragged line of infantry and watched the Saracen foe advance to the attack. In the forefront of their ranks rode my double, brandishing a whiplike rapier. Wickedly happy, he was humming an air which I tried in vain to recall when awake, but the words were something like this:

> In sorrow depart,
> Weep till thou art blind,
> For the love of my heart
> Is not love of human kind.

With a jaunty air he approached me, still humming his song. I snapped my clumsy firelock at him, but the weapon failed to explode, and the next instant his keen blade pierced my breast.

With only slight variations this dream recurred again and again. I always awoke from it weak and trembling and bathed in perspiration. So powerfully did it impress me that I began to entertain the fancy that I and this infernal copy of myself had contended time after time in past ex-

istences and that our paths were soon to cross anew.

I do not know into what byways of thought I might have wandered had I been left to brood and speculate in this fashion, but the march of events soon carried the affair into the world of reality. About a fortnight after my first encounter in the forest I awoke from a troubled sleep, oppressed by a sense of impending evil. Outside, a full moon was flooding the world with yellow light. By its aid I could clearly distinguish objects in the room and even see a little distance through the window.

I could hear my heart answering the familiar tick-tock of the clock with a loud lup-tup, and the cold sweat of fear was creeping out of my pores, but for a time I could find no reason for my terror. Watching the window closely, I at length perceived my own face pressed close against the glass, regarding me with eyes that shone in the half light.

Some events burst upon us with such sudden and unexpected weight that for a time they deprive us of the power of movement. This was one of them.

I lay like one paralyzed, unable even to utter a useless cry. The me on the outside carefully raised the window and dropped some little four-footed creature into the room. This thing began a mad race about the floor, uttering shrill shrieks very like those of a child. At the first prolonged, piercing wail I sprang from my bed and through the open window almost in one leap.

Now began a weird chase, unlike anything I have ever heard of or imagined unless it be the fantastic adventures of Alice in Wonderland. Myself, lacking shoes and trousers, my night clothes flapping in the breeze, pursued a fully clothed edition of myself over the rough lawn.

Round and round we ran like a sportive puppy chasing its tail. From their perch in the pines the great owls hooted, and the yellow moon looked down at us with a grin. It was not until long afterward, however, that the ludicrous aspect of the affair occurred to me. At the time my sole thought was to come to hand-grips with my arch-enemy and eternally end our affair. The pursuit seemed endless, but the clothed edition of myself at last ran into a clump of thick undergrowth and once more hid from my sight and hearing, although I could still sense his hated presence.

Giving up the useless pursuit, I returned to my cabin and found no trace of my nocturnal visitors except the open window. For some unaccountable reason I soon fell asleep. On awaking in the morning I tried to convince myself that it was only another vivid dream, but the cuts and bruises on my feet were too real to be disposed of in that way.

After this my situation became worse. For a time I did not actually see my evil twin, but not a night passed that I did not become aware of his presence about my dwelling, and upon going to investigate I would hear his retreating footsteps; at other times I would be aroused by strange blood-curdling yells. I feared to appeal to anyone for aid because I could picture the unbelieving looks with which my tale would be received. At length I took to sleeping during the day and to prowling the forest at night. I thus escaped persecution, but I had an uneasy feeling that my tormentor was biding his time and preparing new surprizes for me.

In the small hours of a Friday morning I was returning to my home after one of these nocturnal rambles. Dew dripped from the leafy branches above my head; little breaths of air fought and grappled

as they flowed over the fog-draped river. The moon had waned into the little crescent of the last quarter and there was something cheerless and evil about its light. My troubles half forgotten, I trudged along the woodland path in a sort of waking dream out of which I was startled by the now familiar screams of mortal anguish.

A stone's throw ahead of me was a familiar figure bearing some sort of burden. Brandishing my staff I ran after him, but my incautious foot caught in one of the snarelike roots which here and there rose from the path like crooked croquet arches, and I fell, striking my head a heavy blow.

When I had finished counting stars my enemy had vanished and I was holding in my arms the burden he had let fall. It was a yellow-haired child—a boy about one year old.

Utterly dumfounded by this new development, I writhed on the ground. Ignoring the pitiful wails which came from the little bundle by my side, I implored high heaven for light on the mystery in which I was entangled, but heaven was dumb. The river babbled inanely, the face in the little moon leered at me, and that was all.

At length a sort of calmness succeeded my frenzy. I carried the child to my cabin and placed him on the bed; then barring the door and closing the heavy shutters I sat in the thick darkness, biting my nails and thinking—thinking.

As one whose life is finished may find his whole past parading before him in his last moment, so an endless troop of memory pictures crowded through my tired brain; and all the while the whimperings of the hapless infant smote on my ear drums. How was I to explain his presence here? How anything?—how—how——

But in the end it matters little whether we dumbly submit to fate, or whether we struggle and pray. In some far-off corner of the universe sat the little gods who had staged this drama for their pastime, and they had decreed that it should move swiftly to its conclusion. The hundreds of birds that lived about my home were announcing the coming of dawn, when I noticed a new sound rising above their shrill chirping.

Oung—oung—it rang through the forest in tunable notes—not unlike the distant sound of a great bell. At first far and faint, it grew in volume until the forest rang with it, and then I knew what it was. It was the bay of a hunting hound. So crowded had the past hour been that I failed to grasp the significance of this new development until a pack of the great beasts were prowling about the cabin and leaping and snarling at the closed door. Even at this my numbed wits failed to grasp the fact that I was the quarry they were seeking, until close behind the dogs I heard the tramp of men's feet.

They paused not to parley, but crushed my door with a heavy timber, and burst in upon me like a wolf-pack. With faces drawn and white and with lips parted in a sort of animal snarl they invaded the little room. Some carried electric torches which they directed aimlessly about; others were brandishing firearms, and all were talking with the full vigor of lusty lungs. Meanwhile the dogs crowded in among the men and their deafening clamor was the final touch needed to transform my once quiet retreat into bedlam.

Possibly this confusion only lasted for a matter of seconds, but to my strained nerves it seemed to stretch over an interminable time before it was broken by an occurrence more bizarre and dramatic than any of the preceding ones had been. While the hubbub was at its height a stout fellow wearing the barred jacket and high boots of a lumberman discovered the blanket-wrapped bundle up-

on the bed and turned his flashlight full upon it.

"By the Great —— ——! look at this," he exclaimed, profaning the name of the Savior in a great oath; and so terrible was the emotion that shook the rough voice that the blasphemy sounded like a prayer. The human clamor stilled instantly and all crowded about the bed. Even the dogs with their keen senses became aware of the sudden tension and fell silent save for low whines.

Before us in the white glare of the torch lay the child—a likable little fellow with blue eyes. He bore evidence of the rough handling which he had received, but it was not this fact that caused the gasp of horror.

Upon one chubby shoulder was a wound, a slight thing in itself, but at its edges were the unmistakable marks of teeth—human teeth!

There followed a moment of stunned inaction. The color fading from their faces, the men stared and gaped as if unable to credit the monstrous thing. I could hear their breath drawing in with a peculiar sucking gasp. Slowly, as if on a pivot, all turned until they were facing me; then grim-faced and savage they attacked me with their bare hands. In a moment I was bleeding from a dozen wounds, and I would have died then and there had not one of their number who wore a uniform intervened and saved me for a worse fate.

In obedience to his sharp commands they left off beating me, but they snapped irons on my hands and feet and bound me with rope until I resembled a swathed mummy. As my captors worked I could hear them muttering threats about torturing and burning me, but the fates had spun a different web for my luckless self. Bound hand and foot, I was dragged to the road, thrown like a calf into a waiting truck and hauled to a huge stone jail; and not until the prison doors had closed upon me did I receive a word as to the why and wherefore of this latest misfortune.

The child had been stolen from the home of a wealthy man who had his summer residence about ten miles from my abode. By means of a ladder the thief had boldly entered a second-story window and had stolen the youngster from his crib without awakening the nurse who slept in the same room. She discovered the crime soon afterward, and the posse were able to follow close on the heels of the miscreant, who everybody now believed was myself.

Circumstances were against me, but I merely stated that on the night of the crime I was walking at an unusual hour because I was restless and unable to sleep. In the course of my walk I had encountered a man walking furtively and carrying a screaming child. I had tripped while pursuing him and had fallen so hard that I was stunned. When I recovered I had picked up the child which the kidnaper had abandoned and was caring for it when the posse arrived.

This was as much of the truth as I could hope for anyone to believe, and it soon transpired that even this hope was vain. The fable of the man-wolf had been given to the public, and it was useless to try to convince them of its falsity. Foolish old Sixteenth Century legends by the score were made to apply to my case and were given to the public with a Walrus and Carpenter gravity. The bit of truth about my walks in the snake-infested hill was seized upon avidly, and thereby many a tale was hung. In addition to my lupine lust for blood they said that I had acquired some of the magic of the snakes with whom I played, and thus it was that I could lure my intended victims to their doom.

In spite of the universal contempt and horror with which I was regard-

ed, there was one magic wand of which they could not deprive me. Its name was money. At its touch the prison cell became comfortable; and an able lawyer was found who, after due investigation, assured me that the net of circumstances connecting me with the crime of kidnaping was too weak to hold me long.

I might have obtained my freedom on bail, but I found the locked and bolted prison very comfortable. I fancied that its heavy walls would exclude my strange tormentor, and that thought in itself was compensation for much of the evil that had befallen me. There were a few other prisoners in the jail, but they did not annoy me, and I found real comfort in the visits of my attorney.

I THINK that my respite lasted exactly one week, and then came the deluge.

I was sitting idly in my cell, indulging in my old pastime of daydreaming, when from the corridor I heard a voice like my own, mouthing this doggerel verse:

Myself met myself on the Camperdown lane;
Myself from myself to untangle I tried,
But the tangle untangled retangled again
And myself with myself must forever abide.

There before me in the corridor was my double. In his hands, and crying piteously, was a little four-footed animal with a face like a child's. His leering countenance pressed close against the bars, my arch-enemy mumbled over and over again the inane rime:

Myself met myself on the Camperdown lane

This was more than flesh and blood could endure. In frantic attempts to reach my hated tormentor I tore at the hard iron bars with teeth and hands, and I screamed until the spiders crept out of their hiding places in the old walls to listen.

At length strong men came into my cell and bound me to my cot. They gave me some drug which caused me to fall into a deep sleep, and when I awoke my evil genius was gone; but I turned my face to the wall and pulled the blanket over my head.

When my attorney visited me again he was accompanied by a grave-looking old man who wore a neatly trimmed beard. This man talked to me for a long time and I told him everything. He did not interrupt with questions, but listened intently, nodding his head in understanding.

All that we said does not concern the present story. The result of our talk was that I left the prison and went to live with my new friend, who, as I was to learn later, is a doctor.

He has given me a splendid apartment with every convenience. It has thick stone walls, and the barred windows have shades which when drawn exclude every ray of light. I care for this apartment with my own hands. I have keys for the doors and I never open them to anyone except the doctor. My meals are brought to the door of my living room, but the attendant who brings them must depart before I go out for them.

Now and then I venture into the outdoors, but I soon hurry back. I have a great fear of meeting with myself again.

On the Dead Man's Chest

An Occult Serial

By ELI COLTER

The Story So Far

FELIX UNDERWOOD, a repulsive-looking cripple with a heart of gold, is a member of The *Squared Circle*, a club of fifty men who profess to be atheists. His love of nature and its beauties leads him to believe in God, and his yearning for a more beautiful body than the ugly one he possesses leads him to believe in a life after death, in which he can shed his monstrous husk and have a beautiful body such as he desires.

Told by the specialists that he has not long to live, Underwood denounces the atheistic views of his fellow club-members, and promises to come back after death in a beautiful body, patterned after one of the club members. He asks Lafe Daniels, president of the *Inner Circle* (the picked inner group of the *Squared Circle*), to pin a little white immortelle right on the center of his chest when he dies, and agrees to come back after death and show the flower to him.

His death comes suddenly, and it is learned that he has been busy among all the members of the *Inner Circle* for several days before he died, piecing together the details of his promised return from the grave.

PART 2

THE undertaker stood quietly waiting by the door as eighteen men filed slowly past him into the back room where, upon a small platform, stood the large, especially constructed casket containing the body of Felix Underwood. Eighteen men, thought Pete Garvin, last in line; eighteen men and not one woman. Just ahead, Lafe Daniels turned to glance at him a look of puzzled inquiry. The undertaker, following at Garvin's heels, motioned the men to a double row of chairs placed against the wall facing the casket. Walking to the platform, he paused and waited for them to seat themselves. Daniels, stepping to one side to let the three intervening pass, slipped into a chair beside Pete Garvin.

"This is a funny funeral, Pete," he whispered. "Why don't they have it in the chapel, instead of the back room?"

"I'd noticed that," Garvin whispered in reply. "I thought Felix was dead when I called Doc Hammerton, but he wasn't. He rallied and talked to Doc for quite a while before he died. He had no people, and he left all arrangements with Doc. Thinking he was dead, I'd gone on. I couldn't—stand it. I suppose this must be something he wanted." Garvin paused, seeing that the undertaker had stepped upon the platform and was about to speak.

"This ceremony is somewhat unusual, gentlemen, but it was the wish of the deceased," said the undertaker, as though in response to Garvin's thought. His professionally muted voice jarred on the deceased's old friends. Garvin nudged the banker, who nodded, his eyes on the undertaker. The quiet voice proceeded: "Mr. Underwood left all arrangements in the hands of Dr. Hammerton, who is waiting in the adjoining room to perform his part in the rite. That is all I have to say, I believe. Dr. Hammerton." He raised his voice slightly, and the door behind him opened; the physician entered the room and approached the platform to assume a position at the undertaker's side.

As he stepped close to the coffin and halted, Hammerton gazed steadily into the open bier, then raised his

eyes to the eighteen men who sat watching him, waiting. And eighteen pairs of eyes noted that the doctor's face was pale, his gaze deep with some somber reflection.

"Brothers of the *Inner Circle,*" he began abruptly, "I asked you to come here and witness the only funeral service that is to be performed over the body of our late member, Felix Underwood, at his request. Just before he died, Felix was very lucid, possessed and conscious for more than thirty minutes. In that time he made very clear to me exactly what he wanted done. There is to be no sermon, no formal ceremony. The body is expertly embalmed, and the casket is to be hermetically sealed. First, his only wish for any obsequies whatever was that the Hollow Square should sing over the body the second and fourth stanzas only of *Nearer, My God, to Thee.*" Hammerton ceased speaking, well aware that such a request would cause no little astonishment among the men of a quartet whose regular repertoire consisted of such classics as "And the worms crawl out, and the worms crawl in"—or "When I die, don't bury me at all, just pickle my bones in alcohol," or any of a double-dozen others of like sentiment and timbre.

The four men rose from their seats by the wall, glanced at each other in consternation, hastily rummaging their memories for words, whispering back and forth in agitation as they filed to the platform and grouped themselves by the casket. Wardell, the first tenor, being the only one of them who knew the words, it was agreed he should sing the melody to the others' hummed accompaniment. He sounded the key tone, the others replied with their separate intervals, then Wardell's high, clear voice rose in the old song, the tones of the other three supporting him, blended like an organ.

Though like a wanderer,
  Daylight all gone,
Darkness be over me,
  My rest a stone.
Yet in my dreams I'd be
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
  Nearer to Thee.

Then with my waking thoughts,
  Bright with Thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs,
  Bethel I raise.
So by my woes to be
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
  Nearer to Thee.

Perhaps to no man present were those particular verses so fraught with significance as they were to Lafe Daniels. Beyond the grave, he told himself, Felix was reaching back for a parting shot straight at him. "Then with my *waking* thoughts"—and God—God—the song was full of God. With a strange feeling of detachment, the banker watched the four men of the quartet as they started to return to their seats, and saw Hammerton motion them to remain. Then again the doctor spoke.

"Beyond this, Felix asked little. Will you all step forward and take a good view of the body, please?"

It was a wondering, slowly moving file of men that paced toward the platform, gathered about the bier and stood gazing down at the man within. Garvin had managed to stay close to Daniels. He looked at the face in the casket, and suddenly his eyes widened, narrowed, and stared intently at the dead man. The purple birthmark seemed to have faded, the huge nose grown thinner, the heavy mouth settled into a more symmetrical, less contorted mold. Garvin gripped Daniels' arm.

"Lafe," he whispered, "Am I crazy, or is he less—less hideous than he was before?"

"You're not crazy," the banker returned. "But that's merely the art of the undertaker."

"Gentlemen." Dr. Hammerton's eyes searched the eighteen faces around him. "I must tell you that Felix had some queer idea of trying to reach us after he died. No matter what our beliefs are, in the presence of death we are compelled to have respect for the thoughts of the man who has passed out, regardless of their seeming ludicrousness. We must remember that to our brother lying here it was not horseplay, but a vital theory to which he had given a great deal of thought. As such we must regard his final wishes. I do not know his entire plan. Only parts of it were given me by him, the rest of it is scattered among you—he left me as the overseer, as it were, and according to him it will all dovetail at the appointed time. This much I am to tell you now. This casket is to be hermetically sealed and kept in my study till the plan Felix evolved either proves itself, or fails. Before the casket is sealed, one of you has something Felix wished placed with him. On his chest, he said."

Daniels started, stood very still for a moment, then took from his pocket Felix Underwood's wallet. From it he extracted the green-dyed flower, and the others watched with large curiosity as he leaned over the coffin and pinned the bright blossoms to the dead man's shirt, square in the center of his chest. He raised himself to a standing position and looked at the doctor.

"Thank you, Lafe." The doctor turned to the undertaker. "Will you kindly seal the casket now? It was his wish that we watch you do it."

The undertaker made his way to the bier and ran a testing forefinger quickly around the edge of the open top. Daniels, watching closely, saw that the coffin was lined with a sheet of copper, perhaps a quarter of an inch thick, and that a small strip of rubber was laid round the edge of the copper rim. The undertaker turned to the wall and lifted a heavy plate of glass leaning there, carried it to the casket and laid it carefully on the rubber strip, then with all possible haste screwed it tightly down. Over the plate of glass he placed the lower portion of the mauve velvet lid, leaving the face under the glass exposed to view. As he stepped back Daniels asked in an undertone, "May I ask what that does to it?"

"Surely." The undertaker nodded. "It makes it absolutely airtight. A body will keep in such a casket for years. He's sealed in there as securely preserved as the fruit your wife seals up for the winter."

"I have no wife," Daniels responded dryly, "but I understand."

"Well, I guess that's all." Hammerton looked once again into the dead face, somehow softened by the eternal majesty of the last sleep. "The casket will be taken to my house this afternoon. You all know where my study is. Felix asked that you come often and view his body, and—weird remark—he said you were to notice that the flower never changed. You are at liberty to come in, any of you, at any hour of the day or night. If I am not there, Parke will admit you—but he is forbidden on pain of dismissal to enter the study himself. Shall we disperse?"

One by one the men passed the coffin and moved on toward the doorway leading to the alley. The eyes of each lingered upon the serene, set face, and paused last, curiously, on the patch of bright green flowers pinned to the dead man's chest. Gathering in twos and threes the nineteen men turned off down the street. At the curb of the intersection at the first cross-street, the doctor, the banker and Pete Garvin stopped for a final word among themselves.

"That *was* a queer thing to say, Doc—that we were to note that the

flower never changed. Why should it change?" Daniels asked, watching the doctor closely, wondering how much Felix had told him.

"Don't know what he meant, I'm sure." Hammerton was obviously mystified. "He placed a slight emphasis on the word 'flower'. It was almost as though he was hinting that the body *might* change. I fear——" He hesitated, glancing at Pete Garvin, then resumed: "I fear poor old Felix was a little touched, facing death so long, brooding. Well, well—so we go. The *Inner Circle* will have to take in another man to fill his place, pretty soon."

"Yes, of course," Daniels agreed, emphatically. "I don't like seeing the *Inner Circle* minus its customary number."

"No man can ever fill Felix's place!" Garvin put in, with loyal vehemence.

Neither of the other men answered, respecting his years-long affection for the dead man, realizing that most of them had loved Felix Underwood little less than Pete. They exchanged glances in a strained silence, nodded a hasty good-bye and separated to go their own ways.

Pete Garvin walked slowly on till the other two were out of sight, then he turned and hurried back to the undertaker's, slipped into the back room and approached the coffin for a quiet look at his old chum all to himself. Bending over, he concentrated his gaze on Underwood's face, and he was very certain now of what his eyes had told him before. The gargoyle features were less hideous, the purple blotch a shade less vivid. The art of the undertaker?

Pete Garvin was not so sure. He turned away from the bier, traversed the alley, and walked slowly down the street, deep in thought.

THREE months passed, and no man had been chosen to fill Underwood's place. Several members of the *Squared Circle* had been considered and rejected without their knowledge, the waiting list had been investigated, and the nineteen members of the *Inner Circle* were about agreed that the man to fill the empty chair was not then available.

During those three months the eighteen had dropped in at Hammerton's big house with growing frequency. Their visits were of short duration, and little was said among them concerning the dead man. But with a sense of wondering whether he could credit his own sight, each man had noted a certain thing, and wondered if it were his imagination, or if the others saw it, too. The outline of the repulsive face remained the same, the little vivid green flower lay still and unchanged upon the dead man's chest. But the purple birthmark was perceptibly fading from day to day.

On the night that was the three months anniversary of Felix Underwood's death, Hammerton called the eighteen men to a gathering in his study. They arrived promptly at the hour he had set, greeting each other with elaborate casualness, making a rather dismal attempt to sustain their usual jocularity as they sat talking around the huge fireplace. But all of them felt the slightly strained atmosphere, in spite of their determined refusal to admit anything out of the ordinary in word or act. All of them were consciously waiting for the doctor to make some move, and frequently a pair of eyes darted a covert glance at the big mauve casket standing by the wall, closed for the first time since Underwood's death. When the last man had arrived and sauntered in to join the others, Hammerton approached the bier, stopped and turned to stand by it, facing the others.

The instant hush that followed his action bore ample proof of the alert status of every man's mind. The doctor gestured toward the mauve headpiece covering the dead man's face.

"It was Felix's wish that I have you all congregate here on this date. I was to place the headpiece over the face for four days preceding this gathering, and remove it here in the presence of you all. I'm sure——" Hammerton hesitated, shook himself with sharp impatience and went on briskly, "I'm sure I don't see the good of all this hocus-pocus. But Felix asked it. If you will step over here I will remove the headpiece, we will look at him, then you are at liberty to spend the evening with me, or go, as you choose."

The men arose from their seats, leisurely, some of them striving to evince an appearance of boredom, most of them wishing the whole business were done, none of them too eager to view again the long-embalmed body. When they had finally gathered around, Hammerton unscrewed the headpiece, lifted it without glancing at the body, and leaned to one side to lay it on a small stand he had placed there for that purpose. Hearing a concerted gasp, he wheeled to see the men craning their necks, bending over the casket, ejaculating excitedly. He looked through the plate of glass and his exclamation was added to the astonishment of the rest.

The birthmark was entirely gone. The ridged skin had tautened and smoothed, the brow was white and unlined, the closed eyes covered by lids as normally colorless as any man's. The effect upon the gargoyle face was startling. Still the face of Felix Underwood, but more human, less repelling than ever before.

"Good Lord, what do you make of that?" cried John Morgan.

"It's—queer. After all he vowed to do—superhuman," Pete Garvin said unsteadily.

"Rot!" Daniels snorted, with a contemptuous sneer. "The body was drained of blood, perfectly preserved, and the color has simply faded with time."

"You know better!" Garvin's eyes blazed with excitement. "The color was in the skin itself. Why, look—even the ridges are gone, his face is as smooth as yours and mine. Smoother, by Jove! Felix knew what he was talking about. You're simply afraid he *can* prove it. You'll fight him every foot of the way."

"I certainly will," Daniels snapped, turning away impatiently. "I shall allow no mere unusual coincidence of the embalmer's art to upset my cool reasoning. If Felix can live on after death and accomplish any Twentieth Century miracle, he's got to show me! I'm going down to the club. Anyone else want to go along?"

Somewhat ashamed of their momentary dismay and shaken thoughts in the face of their president's quick denial of anything supernatural in the phenomenon, the others drew away from the coffin and followed him down the hall. None of them, not even Hammerton, noticed that Pete Garvin remained for a fraction of time staring down into the dead face. And certainly none of them heard his whispered words:

"Show him, Felix! *Show him!*"

It was only the next week that Pete Garvin approached Lafe Daniels, great eagerness evident in his every look and manner. The president of the *Inner Circle* was in the billiard room of the clubhouse, toying idly with cue and ball, arguing good-naturedly with Tink Wardell. The two men looked up as Garvin strode into the room.

"What's doing, Pete?" the banker asked, smiling. Most people smiled

at Pete Garvin. "You look like a kid with a new toy."

"Something of the kind," Garvin grinned. "I've got the new man for the *Inner Circle*. He lives at the Bromway Hotel, and he comes from Chicago. I met him out in the park a few days ago, we got to talking and I liked him immediately. We hit it right off from the start, so I sounded him out. He's the most rabid atheist I ever saw, has a fine character and plenty of financial backing. Just the chap we want. I vouch for him."

"Well, that's good enough, I guess." Daniels stared at Pete Garvin, remembering that it was Pete who had declared no man could take the dead man's place. Well, if time had softened his grief, and he'd found a new chum, they'd have to see if they couldn't put the man through. "You're a pretty keen reader of men, Pete. And it seems rather fitting that you should bring in the new member. You haven't suggested anybody before, have you?"

"No." Garvin's face darkened. "I—simply couldn't. Any of the old crowd—it was too much like trying to fill Felix's shoes. That can't ever be done. But a new man—and he's so different from Felix—don't you see how it is?"

"I do," Daniels agreed, gravely. "Bring him around."

The next week the *Inner Circle* again boasted its twenty members. To a man, they had, like Pete, taken to the new acquaintance immediately. The night following the initiation of Gene Lane, "introduced and vouched for by Brother Pete Garvin," five of the twenty were standing by a table in the billiard room discussing the new member.

"How long has he been in Bass City?" Hammerton asked.

"Not long," Daniels informed him. "You know our policy, we demand most of a fellow in his belief, singleness, character and cash. Lane seems to be okeh all through. Pete fell for him, and Pete knows men. I couldn't have turned him down if it were possible to get him through—Pete's been so lost since Felix died. Yes, I am sure Lane's a fine chap."

"Stunning-looking fellow," Hammerton put in. "I can't help thinking he's about the type of man old Felix must have envied." Daniels glanced at the doctor with a sharp intentness.

"Was that a chance shot, Doc?" he asked, meaningly.

"I don't get you," Hammerton answered, puzzled. "It wasn't any shot at all. It was merely a logical remark. What do you hint, Lafe?"

"Well, I think I'll spill something, here among us five. Didn't you know, Doc, that Felix swore to make his body over, if he lived after death, in the likeness of the most perfect man he could find?"

"I did not." Hammerton shook his head, adding with a pitying sigh, "Poor old Felix was surely next door to insane. That's what he meant then about the flower, wasn't it? Hmm! Well, he's better off where he is, than to have had madness mar his keen brain."

"What are Lane's measurements, Wardell?" Daniels turned to the secretary of the *Inner Circle*.

Wardell laid down the cue with which he had been indolently sighting at a ball, and scratched his head, thinking, striving to recall Lane's initiation card.

"Oh, now I remember. Six feet three, two hundred and ten pounds, all lean muscle, forty-two chest, twenty-seven waist, eight inches chest expansion. Regular Greek god, and in perfect organic and constitutional condition. In the pink, I'd say."

"Yeh, face and all," agreed John Morgan. "Pst. There they are. . . Evening, Lane. Top o' the mornin', Pete. Join us?"

The new member stood in the doorway, Pete Garvin at his elbow, smiling into the room. His magnificent figure showed its every line under the perfectly cut tweeds, his muscles sliding like a panther's tendons as he nodded, turned to Pete with an inquiring glance, and walked toward them. His symmetrical head, topped by a mass of wavy, shining black hair, was set well back on his shoulders, like the head of an old Greek sculpture. His face was clean-cut, and as beautifully limned as a cameo. The large, black eyes, under heavy high-arched black brows, were brilliantly alert and alive.

"Why, yes—don't care if we do—eh, Pete? What is it? Pocket?" His voice was slightly lighter than one would have expected, very smooth and even of inflection, never rising or lowering to any appreciable extent.

Pete Garvin picked up a cue, offering it to Lane, and cordial greetings passed around the group. Wardell yawned, stretched, and excused himself, starting toward the door and beckoning to Daniels. Daniels excused himself also, following Wardell, and in the hall the secretary spoke.

"It isn't all his looks, Lafe. Lane *is* an A number 1 chap. I was impressed with what Doc said in there, about Lane's being the kind of man Felix would have wanted to be. And what you told—if Felix swore to do that, and if he lives somewhere, he's got a perfect pattern in Lane."

"Humpf!" Daniels snorted impatiently. "Are you going loony too? I wish that casket were buried and all this nonsense ended. But—that isn't what you called me out here to say, is it?"

"No." Wardell smiled, amused at the banker's vehemence. "I just wanted to show you something that suddenly struck me as a queer circumstance, after what you two said. Come into my private cubby-hole." Wardell started down the long hall, the banker at his side, and the two entered the secretary's office. Wardell took from the shelf the *Inner Circle's* register, opened the thin black book to the page where Gene Lane had written his name in a slanting, flowing hand, pointing to the signature. It stood out sharply against the others, for the rest were all in quiet black and Lane's was traced in bright green.

"Odd, eh?" Wardell's finger lingered on the conspicuous signature. "He's a positive kind of chap, and when I offered him the office pen he refused it politely, saying he could do better with his own. Then he drew out a fountain pen and put it down there in that staring green. At first I was merely annoyed, it messed the page, you know. But I let it pass and forgot it. But when Doc made that crack in there, and you told what Felix had sworn to do, I thought of the green flower you pinned on his chest—and remembered this green signature. Do you suppose Felix could have influenced Lane to do that—as a sign to us that he'd found his man?"

"Rot!" Daniels answered with sharp violence. "Wardell, I'm surprized at you! Such wild conclusions over the merest coincidence! Any number of men use green ink, and any number of them hate writing with any pen but their own. I've seen fellows refuse to use a strange pen even on a hotel register. Nothing in the world but coincidence."

"Yes, I guess so," Wardell agreed with an odd reluctance. "But you'll have to admit it's a *queer* coincidence. And see here—*I'll* spill something to *you*." He flipped back the page of the register and pointed to the preceding list of names. Halfway down the column was a blank white space. "There is the place where Felix's name used to be. I took it off with ink-eraser."

"Why?" Daniels stared.

"He asked me to. Three days before he died, he came to me and told me something of this plan of his, and made a request of me. It included removing his name from the register the moment I should hear of his death. I shan't tell you any more now—keep that to yourself. But he said he was going to tie us up in a knot. He certainly seems to have done it."

"Humpf! What next!" Daniels laughed shortly, remembering. "Doc was afraid he'd have gone insane if he'd lived. If you ask me, he didn't have far to go!"

In the succeeding three months the nineteen men taken into Felix Underwood's confidence began to doubt their own sanity. Their trips to Hammerton's study grew more frequent, and of longer duration. The doctor's house became the almost continuous rendezvous of some of the nineteen, often all of them, bending over the casket, studying the body beneath the glass, arguing and wondering in ever-increasing excitement. All pretense of keeping up an atmosphere of the casual had been discarded. They frankly admitted to each other that something was taking place there beyond their understanding. Speculation ran high, wild conjectures and lurid hypotheses were advanced recklessly. Only the six who knew what Felix had specifically sworn to do (the four whom Daniels had told, and Pete Garvin) kept an intent, alert reticence.

For, as Felix had predicted, the flower remained unchanged. But that was the only thing which did remain unchanged under the plate of glass covering the hermetically sealed casket. The gross, misshapen body began slowly but surely to shrink and lengthen. There had been five inches play in the casket, three at the head and two at the foot. Under the unanimous urging of the others, Hammerton had removed the rest of the mauve top, the better to watch what went on under that plate of glass. And now the body had lengthened till it occupied the entire lengthwise space of the coffin, and much space to spare grew at the sides.

The fat, bulky shoulders began to straighten and square, the prominent abdomen melted away to a thin flat waist. The thick hands grew slim, narrow and long-fingered. None of the watching men could deny the vast change that had taken place in the embalmed body. By this time all of them secretly felt the first sound stirring of a belief that Felix lived somewhere, and that he was working his will upon the clay he had left behind. Only Lafe Daniels retained his front of scoffing skepticism in the face of the strange phenomenon; and the others who had been loyal members of the *Inner Circle*, too long, as Felix had said, had "eaten out of his hand," to dare speaking their heretical thoughts.

Pete Garvin had come less often to the doctor's house. He and Gene Lane had become inseparable companions. There was a queer psychology in his strong affection for a man so entirely the opposite of his old comrade. Largely, Lane's perfect antithesis to Underwood was the very cause of Pete Garvin's liking. Manifestly no man could ever fill Felix's place with Pete. Felix held his own, inviolate. And Gene, so far removed from Underwood in every way, held only a place of his own, but never the smallest part of the spot Underwood had claimed in Garvin's heart. The two rode together, fished, hunted and tramped the woods for days on end. And how was Lane to know that Garvin was never free from a poignant sense of loss, never quite rid of a sharp regret that these joys had never been for the man who died?

This night, when Underwood had been dead six months, Garvin had come to the big house for one of his infrequent visits to his dead chum. He found all the others there before him, gathered around the bier talking, expressing tentative ideas that were jeered and rejected in insolent ridicule by the banker Daniels.

Pete had left Gene Lane reading contentedly in the Holy of Holies, and stolen away for a flying trip to the doctor's house. He had not been there in two weeks, and though something of fear had kept him away, conscience pricked him and drove him back again. Had Felix not asked it? As he entered the study, the others greeted him with a constraint that did not quite hide their eagerness for him to look within the casket and see what had taken place. He walked slowly toward them, answering their greetings tersely, and bent over the bier. His face went pasty white.

"For God's sake!" he cried out. "Do you see what I see?"

The others crowded round him, scrutinizing the face beneath the glass. The tow-colored hair had darkened by several shades. The brows had deepened in tone and taken a decided upward arch. The thick, bulbous nose had thinned to aquiline perfection of line. The heavy, pendulous mouth was refined into clean-cut, chiseled symmetry. And in the change the altering face and form had taken on an odd familiarity, as of a resemblance to someone they had known, but not to Felix Underwood.

"I don't know what you mean," Daniels lied, levelly. "The body seems to have changed slightly, but we are allowing our imaginations to run away with us. The corpse is merely shrinking, as the embalmed bodies of the Egyptians have shrunk, with time and the evaporation of water from the flesh. Look at a mummy, for example. And as it shrinks it is inevitable that it should alter in general appearance."

"Still fighting him, aren't you?" Pete Garvin cut him short. "The mummies of which you speak are thousands of years old, shriveled and yellow as papyrus. Felix's body hasn't shriveled, the skin is as smooth and white as yours. He's *changed*, that's all. My God, are you fellows blind? He—it—it's beginning to look like Gene Lane."

Daniels' face paled perceptibly, and the other men huddled together for a closer, dissecting scrutiny of the dead Underwood's features.

"By glory, you're right!" ejaculated John Morgan.

"I've noticed that for some time," Hammerton admitted with cool self-possession. "Naturally I have more opportunity to watch him than you have. I've been waiting to see how long it would take the rest of you to realize where the change was tending. Remember what I said in the billiard room some time ago, Lafe? Yes, it's growing to look like Lane, but I have my own theory."

"Theory—theory!" Pete Garvin cried sharply. "It's only Felix himself. He's alive, somewhere. I've been convinced of that for a long time. He's found his model, that's all. But I wish to God he'd chosen somebody else besides Gene."

"Rot!" snapped Daniels. "Felix hasn't anything to do with it, save that he had a long head on him and tried to use us, with fair success. It's a state of self-hypnotism. He made us agree to come here and watch this body, hinting subtly to Hammerton that it would change. Naturally our eyes would focus on a perfectly formed man, the moment he was admitted to the *Circle*. None in the old membership list are so very perfect, I fear." The banker's voice edged with a sneer. "So when Lane appears, our nineteen minds, working in a fair degree of unison, center upon

him as a perfect specimen. Mental suggestion did the rest, and we have hypnotized ourselves into thinking the body's really changed. Self-hypnotism—that's all there is to it."

"Pretty washy reasoning for an intelligent man," Garvin jeered.

"No, Pete—Lafe's not so far off," Hammerton put in warmly. "But he's a little too afraid he will admit something. There isn't any self-hypnotism to it—there I disagree with Lafe. It's the power of the mind, right enough, though. As he said, we've all had Lane in our minds, and with Felix holding the center of the stage as the body began to shrink with water evaporation we ourselves have forced it, by the power of mind over matter, into a likeness of Lane. It isn't much of a likeness, really. But the resemblance is unmistakable, and it shows what the mind can do."

"Well, if the body's really changed, that's about the answer," Daniels admitted, grudgingly.

"*If the body's really changed!* You make me boil!" Pete flashed at him. "You once told me I was a fair judge of men, Lafe. And I'm telling you here and now that yours is the talk of a man already two-thirds convinced. It's the bravado of a fighting fool too stubborn to admit that he's whipped. But you're about ready to break, Lafe—or I never knew a man in my life!"

"Like hell I am!" Daniels barked. "Self-hypnotism or mind over matter—one of the two. But it will take more than that to convince me that any man who is good and dead can be living invisibly and making over his old physical body to soothe his wounded vanity!"

"More bravado," Pete retorted hotly. "And an unworthy, small remark. It wasn't vanity in Felix. He loved beauty. He went out to find it, and I, for one, wish him luck. And his desire to come back was the highest, most altruistic motive a man could have: to save forty-nine men from disaster to their own souls. And if there is a God the *Squared Circle* is on its last legs."

The rest of the men had remained shocked into silence at the violence of the altercation between Daniels and Garvin, but as Garvin finished his last belligerent speech and Daniels made no move to reply immediately, John Morgan spoke with curt decisiveness:

"Well, it's mighty funny business, any way you take it. If *that* was Felix's motive, my hat's off to him. For if we're all wrong, if there *is* anything beyond, if there *is* a God, by God, I want to know it!" Unconscious of the almost ludicrous sound of his last sentence, Morgan lifted his head and looked round at the faces of the other men defiantly.

"So do we all," Wardell replied, grimly.

"Oh, you're a pack of silly nitwits, swayed from cool reasoning by the least wind of the unusual!" Daniels whirled on his heel. "Good night. I hope you'll have regained your senses the next time I see you."

It might seem the logical premise that, in six months, a group of men watching a metamorphosis so gradual would have become accustomed to it: to such an extent at least that the human awe of the Unknown would have faded, the superstitious shrinking of the dead have passed. One becomes accustomed to even extremely unusual or fearful conditions by the virtue of continual proximity and the power of time. Had the issue been of less gigantic proportion, were the outcome to have been less momentous, such might have been the process in this case.

But the vows Underwood had taken were so stupendous, the thing they had seen taking place under their eyes of such unbelievably miraculous portent, that the excitement, instead

of abating as the weeks elapsed, ran over consistently higher, and nineteen men began to feel their nerves. Not all Daniels' violent jibes and sneers, nor Hammerton's cold logical theories, had served the purpose of explaining the phenomenon or jarring them into a calmer attitude. Secretly, each man knew what he had seen, and each man was decidedly positive that he was not the victim of any self-induced hypnotism.

Theories they themselves had none. Hammerton and Daniels had exhausted every logical, probable or even possible theory that imagination could devise. And simply because the thing defied all understanding, all logic, all precedent, the members of the *Inner Circle* had begun to sound their own souls, test the strength of their own beliefs—and find them lacking. Was there, after all, a God? Was Felix possibly alive somewhere, in communion with that God, determined to conquer their unbelief, aided by that God in accomplishing the impossible to sway them from their atheism and save them from themselves? The creed of the *Inner Circle* was toppling.

Daniels was too keen of perception to not sense it, and it infuriated him. He strove with every subtle argument at his command to reassert his old hold over the men of the club, to place back on its pedestal the long-flaunted belief that wavered in spite of all he could do. So Pete said he was ready to break, eh? In the face of such a jibe the banker's sneers increased in venom, he fairly seethed in impotent wrath, part of which was caused by the fact that he knew he was fighting his own thoughts.

The uncanny change in Underwood's body had shaken him. He paraded his old beliefs blatantly lest the others divine it, as Pete had done. The situation was becoming unbearable to Daniels, but he could only grit his teeth defiantly, hang on to his cold sanity and be certain that this must end shortly in a ridiculous fiasco. Then, he told himself pugnaciously, the Inner Circle would swing back to normal and be more like a drove of sheep behind him than ever, hailing him as the only one among them who had kept his head.

It is problematical into what state of nerves they might have all developed, had not something happened to claim the attention of the entire twenty. Pete Garvin, returning from a late drive with Daniels, thought he saw a car suddenly appear directly ahead of him in the road. He was hitting up a smacking pace, and a collision seemed inevitable. He caught his breath, and his quick brain directed him to the only chance of averting the crash: he jammed on his brakes, wondering blasphemously where the car could have emerged, and swung round it—only to find that the car he had thought he saw was a mirage, a shadow thrown back at him by the lamps of another machine approaching on the opposite side of the highway.

Too late he saw his mistake and tried to whirl back, caught the fender of the approaching car, skidded crazily to one side and ended in the ditch at the right of the road, his own car turned turtle atop of him.

Daniels, who had leaped nimbly out of the side door when they struck, got up none the worse for his tumble and raced to the automobile pitched in the ditch. The other car, unharmed, stopped quickly, turned and came back to halt by the banker, and its sole occupant leaped to the ground, questions hurtling excitedly from his lips.

"It wasn't your fault," Daniels assured him hastily, "nor his, either. He saw a mirage in your headlights. Sorry as hell, but glad you escaped without damage. Could you help me get him to a hospital?"

"Why, certainly!"

The stranger threw off his coat and followed Daniels around the wrecked car, inspecting it hurriedly. One rear wheel had been knocked off and the axle imbedded in the dirt bank. They stooped to look under the crumpled top, and the stranger leaped to his feet with an oath, ran to his car, turned the spotlight on the wreck, and came rushing back. They discovered Pete in the ditch underneath, lying very still, with the blood spurting from his head.

The two men exerted all their effort and managed to lift the wreck sufficiently to draw Pete out from under. The driver of the other machine heaved a sigh of relief. One swift glance was enough to assure them that Pete was not dead. The stranger stepped across the low bank and threw open his tonneau door.

"Gad, I'm glad the man's breathing! Let me help you lift him in. He's quite a husky specimen. That's a nasty cut, though. We've got to move."

Between them they placed Pete Garvin on the rear seat, and Daniels sat beside him, supporting the lax body and striving in vain to staunch the blood-flow in the wound. The driver leaped to the front seat, slipped his clutch, stepped on the gas, and the powerful car roared down the road toward Bass City at a mad pace.

As Daniels had feared, the victim's injuries were serious. The banker stood looking down at the drained face after Pete had been brought into his own private room from the surgery. Hammerton followed, in a white blood-spattered apron, sleeves rolled above his elbows. Daniels turned to him in anxious inquiry.

"Is he pretty bad, Doc?"

"I fear he is, Lafe." Hammerton bent over the hospital cot to test Pete's slow heart. "He's lost a lot of blood. We may have to do a transfusion to pull him through. I'll know by morning. You drop in at the club and tell the boys, will you? Have someone ready to give him a pint of blood on an instant's notice. Wardell's got fine, clean blood—so has John Morgan. They're both young enough. I'll leave it to you to see them. I'll stay right by Pete."

Daniels experienced a sinking feeling of the heart as he nodded and quitted the room. High words had passed between him and Pete lately every time they had been together. But under the belligerent argument anent Felix Underwood his old affection for the younger man remained unchanged. Every man in the *Inner Circle* would be shocked to learn of what had happened to Pete. He, Daniels, would give his own blood in a minute, but he was too old. This was a time when one needed youth, he told himself bitterly. Well, Wardell would come forward handsomely, or Morgan either. Doc Hammerton examined most of the men twice a year. He was in a position to know who best could fill his need.

The banker found the men he sought in the lounge. Wardell was discussing with Gene Lane the merits of the open car against the sedan, and Morgan sat by the fireplace, reading. Daniels told them briefly and conclusively what had happened, and what Hammerton had said.

"Pete's pretty low," he finished, "and Doc may need new blood to save him, any time. How long since he examined you two?"

"Last week, both of us," Morgan answered. "Wasserman test and everything."

"I wish I were fit to supply him." Daniels' evident regret was genuinely sincere. "This'd be a pretty dull old club without Pete." Forgotten the high words and harsh, forgotten the issue that had called them forth—

remembered only that Pete lay at death's door and some man's blood must save him, and he had none fit to give.

"You say he may need a pint?" Wardell inquired. "A pint's a lot of blood, isn't it? I'll be glad to do anything I can for Pete, but wouldn't it be just as well if John and I each gave him half the amount? Less taxing on both of us, you know."

"Why, yes—I suppose one is as good as the other. I don't know anything about blood transfusion," Daniels answered, sighing in relief. "Pete's still unconscious."

"I don't think it would be so well," Lane interrupted, resting his brilliant black eyes on Daniels' face. "Personally, I'm as healthy as a young bear. I'll give him a quart, any time."

"By gad!" Daniels flashed a look at Wardell, then his eyes leaped back to Lane's beautifully cut face. "That's white of you, Gene. I don't know why Doc didn't think of you."

"He doesn't know my condition," Lane explained. "Weyland examined me when I joined. But I've a perfect certificate. I'll take it along to show him."

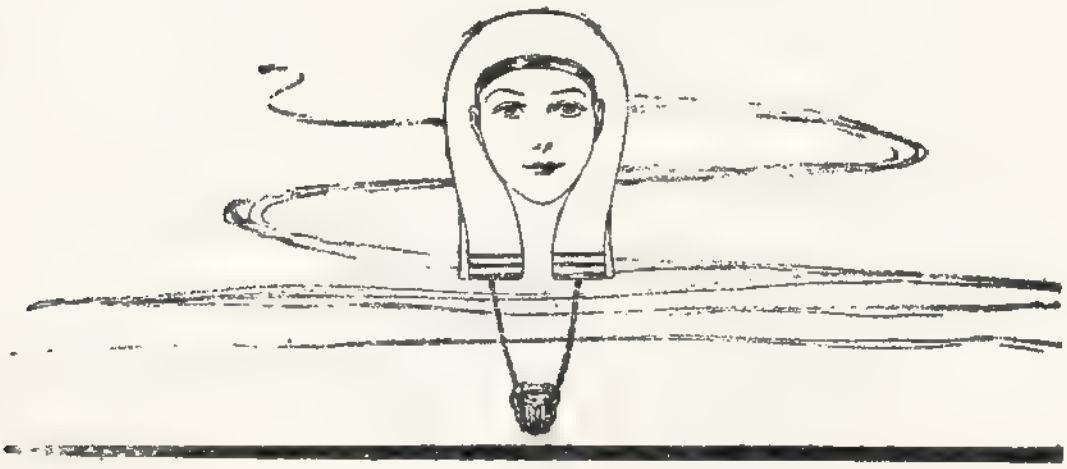
"Why, you needn't bother, Gene ——" Wardell began, but Lane cut him short, and his black eyes snapped.

"When does a fellow need a friend? I'll be ready any time, Daniels. Tell Hammerton. I'll wait up right here till I get word from him, one way or the other."

"Thanks." Daniels held out a hearty hand, and a smile softened his drawn face. "I'll go right back to the hospital. You're a brick, Gene."

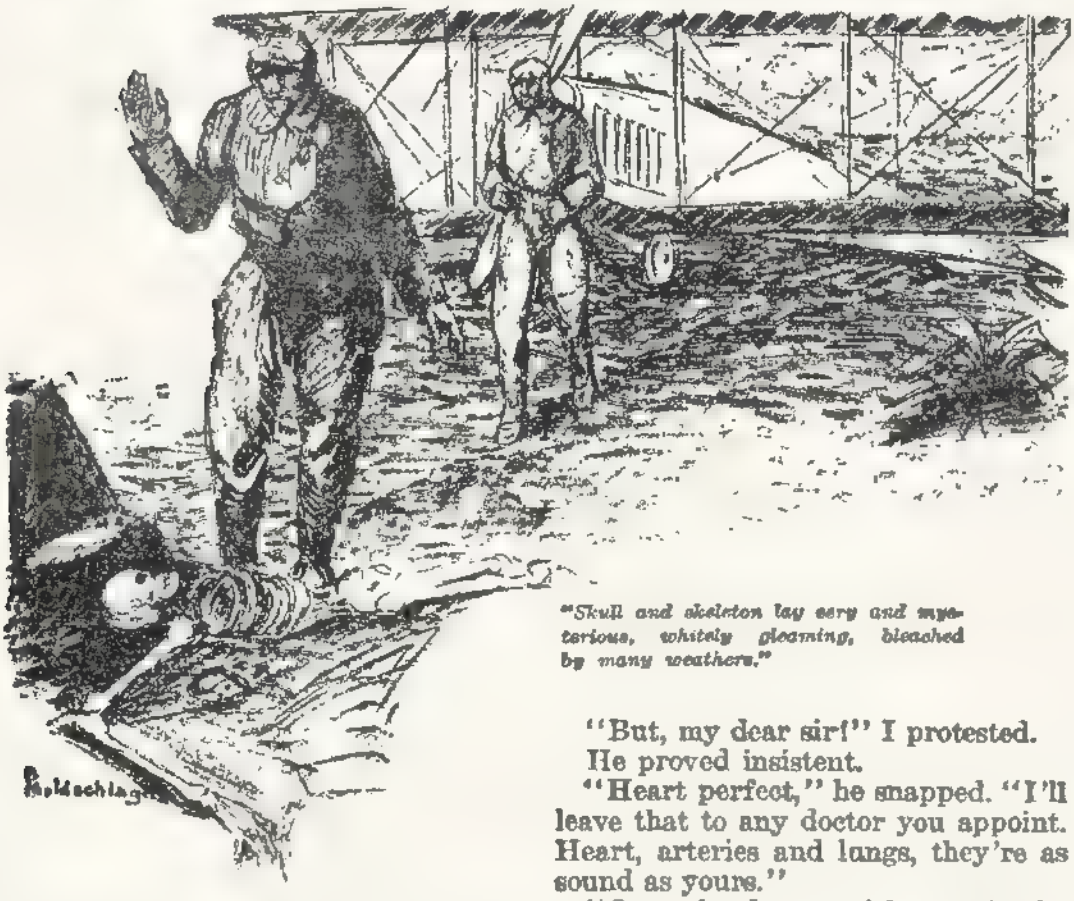
Five hours later, in the little white hospital room, Pete Garvin, still unconscious, and Gene Lane, very much conscious and with anxious eyes on Pete's face, lay side by side. Hammerton and his assistant worked swiftly with sharp knives and little glass tubes, while Lafe Daniels stood white and silent by the wall watching the blood of Gene Lane flowing into Pete Garvin's veins.

The spectacular way in which Felix Underwood reached back from beyond the grave will be detailed in next month's WEIRD TALES



The Other Half

By EDWIN L. SABIN



"Skull and skeleton lay eery and mysterious, whitely gleaming, bleached by many weathers."

I HAD advertised that a passenger would be taken (for a price) on my return trip by air from Omaha to the coast, and awaited the responses with no little curiosity. A flying companion should be chosen carefully.

The very first applicant, therefore, startled me. He appeared almost as soon as the papers were off the presses—a spare, intense, elderly man, with gray mustache and imperial, and bushy brows shadowing singularly bright, restless eyes. His years, of course, were against him; his weathered, lean face and active step bespoke energy, nevertheless I judged him to be rising sixty.

"But, my dear sir!" I protested.

He proved insistent.

"Heart perfect," he snapped. "I'll leave that to any doctor you appoint. Heart, arteries and lungs, they're as sound as yours."

"Just why do you wish to make the trip, may I ask?" said I. "Business or pleasure?"

"Business." He eyed me sharply. "There'll be no woman aboard?"

"Scarcely," I assured.

"All right. No woman. I've been across time and again, by train—and there were women; by auto—drove my own car, alone, but there were the women, before, behind, and no way to avoid them." He grumbled almost savagely. "I'll go by air," he resumed. "I want to get to San Francisco at once. I want to look around. Do you stop at Denver? Salt Lake? Cheyenne?"

"Straight to San Francisco," said I. "We may have to land en route,

perhaps Cheyenne, perhaps Reno; but not for long and I make no promises."

"All right. I'll look around San Francisco. I may have missed something. Then I can work back. I'm not through. You'll have to take me. I'll pay you double. I'm sounder than most of the younger men; I have no family——"

"You're not married, sir?" I queried.

"No, no! Thank God, no! You accept me?"

He noted me hesitate. Perhaps he sensed that I deemed him a trifle off center.

"I'll give you references," he proffered with dignity. "I'm not crazy—not quite. Look me up, for I mean to go. San Francisco, again: then I can work back. There's always the chance," he muttered. "Yes, there's always the chance." And he challenged: "If you find me sane and sound, it's a bargain, is it?"

"Possibly so, in case——"

"And we start at once?"

"Tomorrow."

He paused.

"You're a Westerner?"

"Born and raised in Leadville, Colorado." I assured.

He seized upon the fact.

"Ah! Leadville! We couldn't stop there?"

"Hardly."

"But it was a busy camp, once, wasn't it? A typical camp; a rendezvous, with dance halls, gambling dens, and men and women of all kinds gathered?"

"A boom camp, and wide open," I said. "That was before my day, however."

"Yes," he pursued. "So it was. I've been there. I must look into it again. It's one more place. You were born and raised there, you say?" Lived there some time? Wait! Did you ever happen to see the mate to this, in curiosity shops, say, or among relics of the old-timers?"

Thereupon he unsnapped a small protective leather case and passed me the half of a silver coin, pierced as if it once had been strung.

"An old half dollar?" I hazarded.

"Yes. If you've aviator's eyes you can read the lettering around the rim, young man."

So I could. "God Be With You——" was the legend, unfinished as if cut short. He was gazing anxiously at me, his lips atremble. I turned the piece over and passed it back.

"No," said I; "I never happened to see the other half. A keepsake?"

His face set sternly. He restored the half coin to its case.

"A keepsake. You are married, young man?"

"Not yet."

"Don't," he barked. "Don't. Pray God you may be spared that."

A woman-hater, he; odd in a man who should be mellowing. But upon looking him up I found that this was his only apparent defection. A strange, restless man, however, with few friends; antecedents unknown; personal history taboo with him; and wanderlust possessing him today as yesterday and the day before.

"Again?" his banker blurted. "Bound across again? He only just got back from San Francisco, by automobile, via Salt Lake, Cheyenne and Denver. Drove alone. So he's going through with you? That'll be his fifth or sixth trip this year. He's a regular Wandering Jew."

"And his business?" I invited.

"Business? None."

"On the trips, I mean."

"My dear man, nobody knows. He goes and comes, goes and comes. You'd think he was hunting a lost mine; or a lost child, only he says he isn't married. I believe he has covered the West from end to end and border to border. Did he show you his pocketpiece?"

"A half coin? Yes. And asked me if I'd ever seen the other half."

"That's it. He asks everybody the same, especially if they're Western people. What he wants of the other half, no one knows. A fad, maybe; an excuse to keep moving. He'll not find it in the air, that's certain."

"Not in the air," I agreed. "He must have other reasons for going by that route. To avoid women, he intimated."

"And to get there quickly. He never comes home satisfied. No sooner gets here than something seems to call him; you'd think he had an S. O. S. wireless by the way he hustles out again, maybe over the very same trail. Always searching, always searching; that's the life of old John. And never finding."

"He's past sixty?" I asked.

"Past sixty! He's past seventy, but nobody'd guess it."

And I accepted John Brown as passenger. No one else offered as likely. I notified him to be ready. We hopped off in the morning.

The iron rails crushed the romance of plains travel. With the airplane also the crossing of the West, like the crossing of the East, is business. In the long overland stretches the aviator pays scant attention to the dead epics that he violates with the drumming blast of his propeller when he bores through the atmosphere above those plains where the spirits still dance in little dust whirls that pivot and career with no breath of wind. But I've often wondered what imploring shades we dislocate when we ride in that half-world ether which is neither heaven nor earth.

My passenger and I made our first leg without event. Out of Cheyenne the motor began to buck, and a rudder control jammed annoyingly. There was only one thing to do. Spiraling and slanting like a wing-tipped bird we sought a landing place.

The country below, as revealed, was rugged, inhospitable desert—a bad-lands desert with deeply graven face upturned immutable. Plunging from high covert as we did, and bursting into full earth-view, we should have appeared like a prodigy from the nethermost. But no buffalo rocked in flight, no antelope scoured flashily, no red warriors hammered their ponies for refuge. I saw, however, far, far away toward the horizon, the smoke thread of a train, and I read in the signal a message of derision.

We skimmed above a flattish uplift. Fissures and canyons yawned for us. My passenger's voice dinned hollowly into my ear, through our 'phone.

"A country God forgot. And there's nothing here. Useless, useless! We must go on."

But I had to do it. Passing with a great rush we turned into the wind, and breasting, fluttering, managed to strike just at the edge of a flat-top butte or mesa. We bounded, rolled, checked, halted, and there we were.

My passenger was out first, divested of his safety harness. He acted like one distraught. Our brief stop near Cheyenne had vexed him—he had wished to spend either more time there, or less time. Now this impromptu stop enraged him.

"What a place, what a place!" he stormed. "There's nothing here; there *can* be nothing here. We must get on. I'm wasting time. I paid to get on, to San Francisco; even Salt Lake. Then I can work back. But what am I to do here? And I'm growing old. How long will you be?"

"Not long. And meanwhile," I retorted, "you'll not be bothered with women. You can be thankful for that."

He snorted.

"Women! No women here; yes. A spot without woman: man and God. We've got to get on. I'll pay you well to get me on. Do you hear? To San

Francisco—to Salt Lake; some center where I can look, look, and then work back. I must look again."

He strode frenziedly. A glance about as I stripped myself of incumbrances showed me that we were isolated. The mesa dropped abruptly on all sides; by a running start we might soar from an edge like a seaplane from the platform of a battleship. And I noted also that without doubt we should have to depend upon our own resources, for if this was a country God forgot it moreover seemed to be a country by man forgotten, granted that man ever before had known it. All furrowed and washed and castlemented, it was a region where we might remain pancaked and unremarked, as insignificant as a beetle.

I was hunting our engine trouble, when on a sudden he called, and beckoned.

"Here, you! What's this?"

I went over. Something quickened me, electric and prickling as when one's flesh crawls in contact with a presence unseen. Skull and skeleton lay eery and mysterious, whitely gleaming, bleached by many weathers. He stooped——

"Great God!" he stammered.

"You've found it?" I asked; and I knew that he had, even while he was polishing it against his sleeve.

"I don't know, I don't know. Look at it. Tell me. I can't see. What is it?"

His hand shook as with palsy as he extended it to me; then the half of a silver coin, plucked from the loosened grip of skeleton fingers; the date——

"Give it to me," he cried, and snatched at it.

The date, 1866; and the legend, upon the side less tarnished, "—Till We Meet Again." He fumbled in his pocket. The two halves matched sufficiently—"God Be With You Till We Meet Again."

"What you've been looking for?" I prompted.

He stared dazedly at me.

"Looking for! A thousand times. A thousand years. No, no; not that long, but more than fifty years. Denver, Cheyenne, Salt Lake, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Helena, Laramie, Creede, Deadwood, Leadville, Dodge City—wherever men and women of her kind gathered in her day and his I've searched again and again. Not for her! She must be dead, and long dead. But for word of this; for this, or trace of this. It was mine. I gave it. And now, here! How came it here? Those bones won't speak." He angrily kicked them. "Speak! What were you doing with this half coin? Where was she? Were you man or woman?"

"Woman, Mr. Brown," said I.

His jaw tautened as he faced me full.

"You say woman? How do you know? What woman?"

"I know," said I. "And what woman? A young woman, a girl, somebody's wife who was supposed to have run away with a breed on the Overland Trail fifty odd years ago—but didn't."

He recoiled a step, tottering, countenance blanched.

"What? Supposed! Supposing I say there was such a woman—my own wife, sir—my bar sinister—my cross that has ruined my life and made me doubt God and man and woman for half a century. And this half coin! I vowed I'd have it back. When at old Fort Bridger I got word that *she* had deserted me—deserted me for a scoundrelly half-breed—I swore that I'd trail her down till I got back the only bond between us. It's been my passion; it's been something to live for. That was 1867; this is 1920. I am seventy-four years of age. I have covered the West, and cursed women while cursing her. And to what end? This forsaken spot, a mess of bones,

and no word! Oh, God! I thought I didn't care—she deserved the worst that could happen to her. This is the keepsake token. Yes. But where is she? I loved her. I want to know."

He shut his face in his quivering hands.

I put my hand upon his shoulder.

"Come, come," said I. "The half of the coin and the half of the story have been yours. Shall I tell you the other half of the story, to match this other half of the coin? It says 'Till We Meet Again', remember."

Then he faced me once more.

"We halved the coin when we parted in the States, I for Fort Bridger as a government clerk there, she to wait till I should send for her. Yes, yes. Fifty and more years ago. 'Till We Meet Again'! And mine: 'God Be With You'! Ah! What do *you* know? How can you stand and tell me of *her?* Did you ever see her—did you ever see her?" He clutched me by the arm. "Did you ever see her, that hussy, that scarlet woman, that—that—yes, and my own wife who made me lose faith in woman, man, and God; took my youth from me, sent me wandering about without home and without charity? Curse her! The end of the trail, and what do I find? Dry bones. Whose bones?" He faltered, and he implored, simply: "You guessed? You're too young to have been on the plains in those days. Did you know *him?*"

"Pierre Lavelle?"

"Ah!" he quavered. He dashed down the half coin. "Are you going to tell me these bones are his? No, no! Such men as he live long. And this keepsake! Tell me she died miserably; that will be something. You did know him? You did? Or do you dare to allege you can rebuild a past, from this dungheap? What?"

"You wrong her, Mr. Brown," I answered. "I never knew Lavelle, never saw him. I never knew her—I do not even know her name, except by yours. But——"

"Catherine," he murmured. "Kitty. A beautiful girl, and false as hell."

"You wrong her," I repeated. "You wrong these poor bones. Will you listen?"

"Go on." He steadied himself. "They won't speak. Can you?"

"I'll speak for them," I continued. "In 1867 a government wagon train was en route from Leavenworth for old Fort Bridger of Utah."

"Very likely," he sneered.

"There was a young wife with it, to join her husband at the post. And there was a train attaché named Pierre Lavelle, half Spanish and half Indian—a handsome scoundrel."

"I'll take your word for that."

"He coveted the girl. She was innocent—she had no notion. One evening after supper he and she rode up into a narrow draw, here in western Wyoming, to seek flowers. He roped her and gagged her and left her while he returned to the camp, on one pretext or another. He succeeded in fastening a note inside her tent: 'Tell my husband I've gone with a better man.'"

"I got the note," nodded the old man grimly. "Well?"

"The note was a forgery and a lie," said I.

He sneered again.

"How do *you* know?"

"I know. This first night he rode with the woman tied to her saddle; the second night he freed her. He didn't fear pursuit, and the trail and the train were fifty miles behind. It was a lowering evening, and a wild land. He advanced upon her, she smiled as if she had yielded, but when he reached for her she struck him across the mouth and snatched his knife from his belt and defied him."

"Indeed? And how do you happen to know that, sir?"

"Wait. This stopped him for a

moment. She fell upon her knees and prayed to God for help. He wiped his lips and laughed. Can you imagine that little scene, Mr. Brown? She in white, as she was——"

"She always loved white. There you are right," conceded the old man.

"And disheveled and at bay; he in his buckskins and greasy black Indian hair, his lips bloody and his teeth glistening; and all the country around promising no succor for her?"

"My imagination is dead," he said. "Yours seems much alive. Well, go on, go on."

"Lavelle wiped his lips and laughed. 'There's no God in this region, my lady,' he mocked. 'There's only you and me.' "

"God-forsaken, God-forsaken," the old man muttered. "A land God-forsaken it is, as I have been."

"Is it?" I challenged. "Wait. She prayed, and these are her very words: 'God, lift me from this fiend's hands, or give me strength to lift myself.' Lavelle taunted: 'Why not call upon your husband? He'll be hot to know. I left him just enough word to make him curious.' And he told her of the note. She cried: 'Oh! How I hate you! Some day he shall know, and know the truth. I hope he kills you.' 'Not for you, he won't,' Lavelle answered. 'He won't want you after you've lived in my Sioux lodge for a while.' "

The old man's hands had clenched. He gazed fixedly as if witnessing the scene.

"At this," I proceeded, "she saw something in the fellow's eyes that alarmed her. When he rushed her she dodged and lunged, and snapped the knife blade close to the hilt, upon his belt buckle. Then she ran, leaving a strip of her dress in his fingers. She ran for higher ground—ran like a hunted rabbit; sprang across a fissure, and gained the top of a butte—a flat butte or mesa. And he made after, jeering, for he knew that she had trapped herself. The mesa top ended abruptly. Further flight was barred. He came on slowly, enjoying her plight."

The old man rasped:

"You say all this. How do you know? Answer me that."

"Wait," I bade. "Then she again fell on her knees, panting like a nun of old Panama facing a buccaneer. But suddenly she called out, this time gladly, and flung up her two arms, to the sky. And Lavelle saw that which frightened even him. The north was strangely black and jagged; out of the black there issued a roaring, and a gigantic spectacle speeding very swiftly. It might have been the thunder bird of the Sioux, said Lavelle, or a winged canoe, or monstrous devouring demon—and it might have been an avalanching cloud of wind and rain. But to her it was as if God were riding in upon a thunderbolt chariot, and she had reached up her two arms to be taken into that driving shelter."

"And this happened, you say; did it?" smiled my old man, sarcastically. "And you happen to know!"

"It happened, and I happen to know," said I. "Lavelle was stopped short again. The Indian in him recoiled. Then his ruffian courage surged back within him. Whether god or spirit, it should not have her. So he threw his rifle to his shoulder, and just as the blackness swooped roaring and whistling to envelop her he touched trigger. Then he ran headlong, in retreat out of the way. The cloud descended, it passed, the rush of air in its wake knocked him flat, the terror and the rain and the hail and the thunder and lightning plastered him, face to the ground, at the foot of the mesa.

"IN THE morning the sun rose clear. But Lavelle could not get atop that mesa again. The cloudburst had sheered away the approaches, like a

hydraulic stream, and washed them down as mud and gravel. The mesa rose rimrocked and precipitous, like a biscuit to an ant. He hallooed and got no answer. One horse had broken its tether; he rode the other to a near-by ridge and gazed across. He could see the girl lying white and motionless. His hawk eyes told him that she was dead. So, being a coward in heart, he made off at speed. He quit the country altogether, changed his name, drifted down into border Arizona, and was shot at a gambling table in Tombstone some forty years ago. The girl, you see," said I, "has been lying here ever since, the half coin—that half coin of promise in her fingers, waiting for you and your understanding."

"But," he cried fiercely, "you say so. You weave a story. How am I to know? Where is your proof? Why should I believe? How does it happen——?"

"Because," I answered, "these bones and this half coin 'happen' to be here; and you 'happen' to be my passenger; and we 'happen' to land together upon this 'God-forsaken' spot. And my middle name," said I, " 'happens' to be Lavelle, from the line of my grandfather who in his private memoirs confessed to a great wrong."

My old man plumped to his knees; he groped for the half coin. I left him pressing it to his lips and babbling a name, and I went back to the plane.

THE TWA CORBIES

(Old Ballad)

As I was walking all alane,
I heard twa corbies making a mane.
The tane unto the tother say:
Where sall we gang and dine today?

In behint yon auld fail dike
I wot there lies a new-slain knight.
Naebody kens that he lies there
But his hawk, his hound, and his lady fair.

His hound is to the hunting gane,
His hawk to fetch the wild-fowl hame,
His lady's ta'en another mate,
So we may mak our dinner sweet.

I'll sit on his white hause-bane,
Ye'll pick out his bonny blue een,
Wi' ae lock o' his gowden hair
We'll theek our nest when it grows bare

Mony a one for him makes mane,
But nane sall ken where he is gane.
O'er his white banes, when they are bare,
The wind sall blaw for evermair.

A Fantastic Tale Is

The Cats of Ulthar

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

IT IS said that in Ulthar, which lies beyond the river Skai, no man may kill a cat; and this I can verily believe as I gaze upon him who sitteth purring before the fire. For the cat is cryptic, and close to strange things which men can not see. He is the soul of antique Ægyptus, and bearer of tales from forgotten cities in Meroë and Ophir. He is the kin of the jungle's lords, and heir to the secrets of hoary and sinister Africa. The Sphinx is his cousin, and he speaks her language; but he is more ancient than the Sphinx, and remembers that which she hath forgotten.

In Ulthar, before ever the burgesses forbade the killing of cats, there dwelt an old cotter and his wife who delighted to trap and slay the cats of their neighbors. Why they did this I know not; save that many hate the voice of the cat in the night, and take it ill that cats should run stealthily about yards and gardens at twilight. But whatever the reason, this old man and woman took pleasure in trapping and slaying every cat which came near to their hovel; and from some of the sounds heard after dark, many villagers fancied that the manner of slaying was exceedingly peculiar. But the villagers did not discuss such things with the old man and his wife; because of the habitual expression on the withered faces of the two, and because their cottage was so small and so darkly hidden under spreading oaks at the back of a neglected yard. In truth, much as the owners of cats hated these odd folk, they feared them more; and instead of berating them as brutal assassins, merely took care that no cherished pet or mouser should stray toward the remote hovel under the dark trees. When through some unavoidable oversight a cat was missed, and sounds heard after dark, the loser would lament impotently; or console himself by thanking Fate that it was not one of his children who had thus vanished. For the people of Ulthar were simple, and knew not whence it is that all cats first came.

One day a caravan of strange wanderers from the South entered the narrow cobbled streets of Ulthar. Dark wanderers they were, and unlike the other roving folk who passed through the village twice every year. In the market-place they told fortunes for silver, and bought gay beads from the merchants. What was the land of these wanderers none could tell; but it was seen that they were given to strange prayers, and that they had painted on the sides of their wagons strange figures with human bodies and the heads of cats, hawks, rams, and lions. And the leader of the caravan wore a headdress with two horns and a curious disk betwixt the horns.

There was in this singular caravan a little boy with no father or mother, but only a tiny black kitten to cherish. The plague had not been kind to him, yet had left him this small furry thing to mitigate his sorrow; and when one is very young, one can find great relief in the lively antics of a black kitten. So the boy whom the

dark people called Menes smiled more often than he wept as he sate playing with his graceful kitten on the steps of an oddly painted wagon.

On the third morning of the wanderers' stay in Ulthar, Menes could not find his kitten; and as he sobbed aloud in the market-place certain villagers told him of the old man and his wife, and of sounds heard in the night. And when he heard these things his sobbing gave place to meditation, and finally to prayer. He stretched out his arms toward the sun and prayed in a tongue no villager could understand; though indeed the villagers did not try very hard to understand, since their attention was mostly taken up by the sky and the odd shapes the clouds were assuming. It was very peculiar, but as the little boy uttered his petition there seemed to form overhead the shadowy, nebulous figures of exotic things; of hybrid creatures crowned with horn-flanked disks. Nature is full of such illusions to impress the imaginative.

That night the wanderers left Ulthar, and were never seen again. And the householders were troubled when they noticed that in all the village there was not a cat to be found. From each hearth the familiar cat had vanished; cats large and small, black, gray, striped, yellow and white. Old Kranon, the burgomaster, swore that the dark folk had taken the cats away in revenge for the killing of Menes' kitten; and cursed the caravan and the little boy. But Nith, the lean notary, declared that the old cotter and his wife were more likely persons to suspect; for their hatred of cats was notorious and increasingly bold. Still, no one durst complain to the sinister couple; even when little Atal, the innkeeper's son, vowed that he had at twilight seen all the cats of Ulthar in that accursed yard under the trees, pacing very slowly and solemnly in a circle around the cottage, two abreast, as if in performance of some unheard-of rite of beasts. The villagers did not know how much to believe from so small a boy; and though they feared that the evil pair had charmed the cats to their death, they preferred not to chide the old cotter till they met him outside his dark and repellent yard.

So Ulthar went to sleep in vain anger; and when the people awaked at dawn—behold! every cat was back at his accustomed hearth! Large and small, black, gray, striped, yellow and white, none was missing. Very sleek and fat did the cats appear, and sonorous with purring content. The citizens talked with one another of the affair, and marveled not a little. Old Kranon again insisted that it was the dark folk who had taken them, since cats did not return alive from the cottage of the ancient man and his wife. But all agreed on one thing; that the refusal of all the cats to eat their portions of meat or drink their saucers of milk was exceedingly curious. And for two whole days the sleek, lazy cats of Ulthar would touch no food, but only doze by the fire or in the sun.

It was fully a week before the villagers noticed that no lights were appearing at dusk in the windows of the cottage under the trees. Then the lean Nith remarked that no one had seen the old man or his wife since the night the cats were away. In another week the burgomaster decided to overcome his fears and call at the strangely silent dwelling as a matter of duty, though in doing so he was careful to take with him Shang the blacksmith and Thul the cutter of stone as witnesses. And when they had broken down the frail door they found only this: two cleanly picked human skeletons on the earthen floor, and a number of singular beetles crawling in the shadowy corners.

There was subsequently much talk amongst the burgesses of Ulthar.

Zath, the coroner, disputed at length with Nith, the lean notary; and Kranon and Shang and Thul were overwhelmed with questions. Even little Atal, the innkeeper's son, was closely questioned and given a sweetmeat as reward. They talked of the old cotter and his wife, of the caravan of dark wanderers, of small Menes and his black kitten, of the prayer of Menes and of the sky during that prayer, of the doings of the cats on the night the caravan left, and of what was later found in the cottage under the dark trees in the repellent yard.

And in the end the burgesses passed that remarkable law which is told of by traders in Hatheg and discussed by travelers in Nir; namely, that in Ulthar no man may kill a cat.

SPLEEN

BY CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

Translated by Clark Ashton Smith

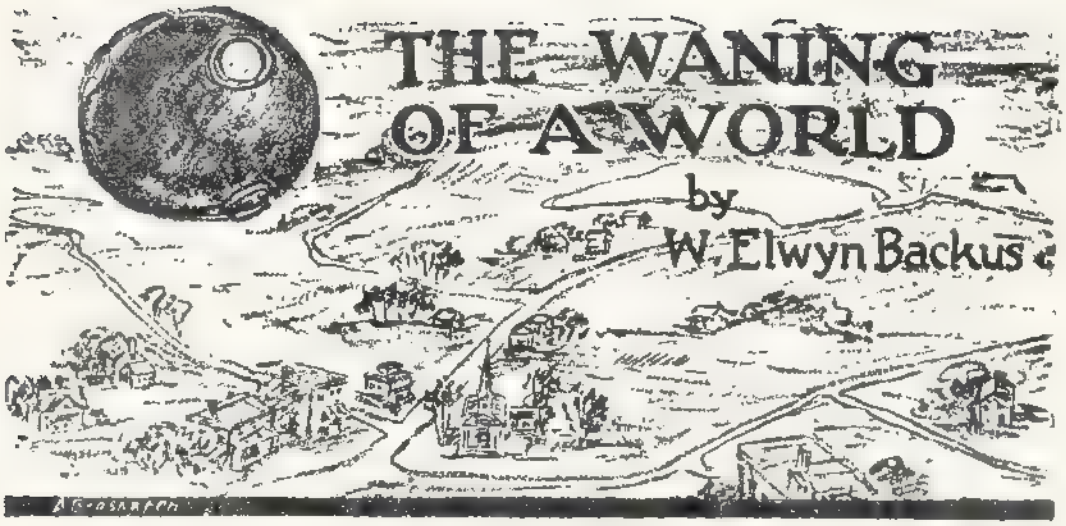
When the low sky weighs oppressive like a coffin-cover
  Upon the groaning spirit, prey to long ennuis;
When all the horizons, and the charnel clouds that hover,
  Pour out a black day sadder than the darknesses;

When the earth is changed into a humid prison-house,
  Where Hope, with futile fearful wing, time after time,
Beats on the dripping wall as might a flittermouse,
  Or soars to meet the ceiling's rottenness and grime;

When all the suns are impotent to succor us,
  In a vast dungeon barred with ever-shafting rain;
And when a silent people of spiders infamous
  Have come to weave their filaments upon our brain.

The bells of all the town, with rage funereal,
  Leap out and launch toward the heaven a frightful howling,
Like that of demons homeless and inimical
  Who whine for blood and souls, about the steeples prowling.

—And the long hearses, with no music and no drums,
  Defile with lentor in my mournful soul; Despair
Weeps, even as Hope, and dire, despotic Anguish comes
  To hang her stifling sable draperies everywhere.



The Story So Far

A VOYAGE to Mars is accomplished in the *Sphere*, by means of an element known as mythonite, which defies gravity. Professor Bernard Palmer, his protégé Robert Sprague, and a stowaway reporter, Hugh Taggert of *The Chronicle*, make the trip.

On Mars they become the guests, and later the prisoners, of the usurping emperor, Kharnov, who has imprisoned the rightful emperor, Hakon, and his daughter Zola. The princess appeals to Robert for help, and the *Sphere* carries her and her father to the loyal city of Svergad.

While the explorers are examining the intricate canal system of Mars, the emperor Kharnov attacks Svergad. Robert and Taggert, launching the deadly Norrenson bolts from the *Sphere*, disarrange the machinery and the *Sphere* is forced to descend. Robert is captured, but rescued by Taggert, and the two make their way back to Svergad, leaving the *Sphere* in the enemy's lines. In Svergad they learn that Zola has been lured to the usurper's camp by a false note, which she believes is from Robert.

The Svergadians attack the besiegers, and Taggert is killed. Robert slays the usurping emperor in a hand-to-hand fight, and faints from his wounds.

22

HOW long he lay unconscious Robert could not know. When he opened his eyes again the din of battle had ceased.

He found himself extremely weak, and it was with difficulty that he got to his feet. For several minutes he swayed uncertainly, his knees all but refusing to hold him up. The rare Martian atmosphere seemed like a vacuum. His senses reeled drunkenly.

An ornamented flask, hung at his late adversary's belt, caught his eye. Uncertainly he stooped and unfastened it. His parched throat seemed afire as he twisted at the flask's cap with clumsy fingers. As the cap dropped to the sand, he raised the neck to his hot lips and drank.

The fluid in the flask all but choked him as he gulped it down. He recognized it as *gao*, a vicious wine distilled from the peculiar sea-weed growth of the marshy regions. Yet the craving to drink was so strong that he absorbed a generous portion of it before putting down the flask.

So potent was the wine that he instantly felt invigorated. His nausea was gone. He seemed to have taken a new lease upon life.

Discovering that his arm was bleeding profusely, he once more attempted the removal of his coat, this time with success. He ripped his left shirt sleeve to the shoulder. There was a deep gash above his elbow. Deftly he twisted a torn strip of the sleeve below the wound, thereby checking the flow, and bandaged the cut as well as he could. This done, he looked about him curiously.

He was apparently alone upon the battlefield, over which a deathlike quiet now prevailed. Here and there a tent stood, while the rest were col-

lapsed upon the ground where they had been knocked down during the fierce hand-to-hand struggle that had surged round them. So precipitate had been the retreat of the late emperor's army that it had not had time to strike its tents in the rear before being swept far back of its original position.

Out on the tent-dotted plain ahead of him Robert suddenly observed another living being. This person, who was perhaps a quarter of a mile distant, was progressing in his direction by a series of curious dashes from one standing tent to another. The sun shone in Robert's eyes, making it difficult for him to see plainly.

As he squinted painfully, he made out a second figure, beyond the first, seemingly in pursuit and gaining. Determined upon solving this latest riddle, Robert tottered off to intercept the fugitive. His strength seemed to return to him with the use of his legs, for his knees soon steadied.

As they neared each other the fugitive flitted suddenly behind a tent and remained there. Evidently Robert's presence had been discovered and had startled him. The pursuer came on swiftly, running directly toward the point where his quarry had hidden. He brandished some object resembling a long whip. From time to time he shouted something unintelligible, which Robert could hear but faintly.

His curiosity now thoroughly aroused, Robert himself moved behind a near-by tent in order that he might observe without being observed.

The pursuer came on quickly, but finally stopped as if confused by his quarry's disappearance. It was plain that he did not know which tent the other had taken refuge behind.

At this moment Robert saw the fugitive dart out into the open again and make directly toward the tent behind which he himself stood. Simultaneously he heard a shout from the other, who in another moment appeared in pursuit. It was at this juncture that Robert suddenly perceived that the fugitive was a woman!

Before he could think further the fugitive dashed round another tent and past his. She halted uncertainly, then, unaware of his presence, darted quickly to his side. Her hand, as she flattened herself quivering against the wall of the tent, touched his. Quick as a flash she wheeled upon him.

Even as her involuntary cry of fear rang out, she recognized him. It was Zola!

The next instant her pursuer panted round the tent's edge, his evil face distorted with passion.

"You devil," he hissed, raising a murderous-looking whip to strike her. His hand dropped abruptly as he espied Robert.

Before the Martian could recover from his astonishment, Robert swung at his jaw with every ounce of his remaining strength. His fist landed with crushing force, driving the Martian's suddenly inert body before it like that of a stuffed dummy. Several yards away it plowed through the sand and lay still. Weeping softly, Zola crept into his arms.

"Oh, my Ro-bert," she faltered, "I thought—I should—never—see you again."

As for Robert, he could but hold her hungrily to him.

"You will never—never—let them keep me—from you again?"

"Never, dearest!"

She sighed contentedly. Her arms crept round his neck. She raised her face to his. Her soft, tremulous lips met his tenderly. Then she caught sight of the reddening bandage upon his arm. Instantly all her mothering instinct was alive. She wriggled free from his embrace like a sinuous kitten.

"You have been wounded!"

Robert chuckled.

"But not nearly so badly as our friend, the late emperor," he said.

"He is——?"

"Dead. He had the misfortune to stop the sharp end of my blade during the skirmish between us."

He said nothing of poor Taggert's death. She would be sadly grieved over the jolly little reporter's brave finish. Time enough when she questioned him, or noticed Taggert's continued absence.

"You fought him for me, my brave! Ah, I should have died had you fallen!"

He took her in his arms again, while only the sun looked on.

"It was well that he died!" she broke out fiercely, without warning. "He lured me from out of our lines with a forged message which I thought you had written, Ro-bert. I was bound, taken to his tent, and a guard set over me. He made love to me, and laughed when I slapped his face. Then he left, but said he would soon tame me. When the battle turned against him, and his army was finally put to rout, his two guards set upon me. One, I stabbed to death, but *this*" (pointing to the Martian in the sand) "wrested the blade from me. I fled and he pursued me here."

She shuddered, but went on with her self-appointed task of improving upon Robert's indifferent bandaging.

"Little dove," said Robert, irrelevantly—and was fittingly rewarded.

Hand in hand they turned toward the city. Before them lay several miles of sand, much of which was strewn with the bodies of those unfortunates who had fallen in battle. Wearily they picked their way, sadness in their hearts over the thought of the many brave hearts stilled, but, withal, a feeling of wonderful peace in having found each other safe.

An atmosphere of utter desolation hung all about them like an envelope of dread. Here and there a poor, wounded warrior raised himself to call for water or plead for aid. They gathered up some of the full canteens from those fallen, and from them gave relief to a number of thirst-tortured ones on their way. Where she could be of assistance, Zola stopped to apply a bandage, to bathe a fevered brow, to speak a word of comfort, and Robert assisted her.

Thus they had traversed nearly a mile when a commotion off to the southeast attracted their attention. A column of soldiers was marching toward them. The flag of the metropolis waving at its head dispelled their first fears. Robert guessed that it was a part of the right column returning with prisoners from its victorious attack. This conjecture subsequently proved correct.

The column soon overtook them. Room in an officers' conveyance was quickly and eagerly made for them by its solicitous occupants, and they rolled back through the city gates in short order.

The approach of the victors had already been observed, and the great city fairly bristled with gay flags. Welcoming, hysterical throngs greeted them at the gates with deafening cheers and shouting.

Among the first to greet them were Hakon and Professor Palmer. They arrived astride a pair of fine *lunas*, as the victorious troops were entering the gates. These animals, which resemble our horses, were of a small, precious herd owned by Hakon, they being quite rare.

With a glad cry Zola leaped out of the conveyance and ran toward her father. Likewise he jumped to the ground and ran with pathetic eagerness to meet her. They embraced each other while the soldiers and public looked on in sympathetic understand-

ing. Scarcely one of them but had heard of their princess' latest abduction with sorrow almost as keen as her father's, for she was dearly beloved by all.

A lump rose in Robert's throat as he noted their touching reunion. Could he—should he—pluck this Martian flower from her kin and country, to take her back with him to a strange world? Once more he wondered whether he could hope to make her happy—to make her forget. He feared not, and his heart was heavy with the realization that he must give her up—that an attempt to transplant her would prove a sad failure. Rather than see her pine away in a strange world he would go back alone, even though it broke his own heart. He turned to greet Professor Palmer as that big-hearted and lovable man swung down off his steed and rushed upon him with open arms. Truly, here was such a friend and companion as few men ever were blessed with.

"Lad, lad, it is good to see you again!" And he hugged Robert with such fervor that it was with difficulty he managed to return his greetings and assure him that he was, indeed, quite safe, and delighted to be back.

Hakon was even more effusive in his greeting. Leading his daughter by the hand, he approached Robert almost humbly, albeit with an unconscious dignity—the inevitable bearing of one born to rule.

"You have brought back my greatest treasure to me, sir; and victory, too. Nothing you may ask of me is too great a reward."

"I but shared in the glorious triumph of your brave men, sire," Robert answered.

The ruler made an imperious gesture born of habit.

"Enough, sir! We owe everything to you. Ask anything you will, and it is yours."

Robert was seized with considerable embarrassment. The cynosure of countless worshiping eyes, including a pair of very blue and very trustful ones beside the governor, he wished devoutly that he could escape. His was not a bombastic nature. Naturally of a somewhat retiring disposition, this sudden lionizing temporarily robbed him of coherent speech.

He thought of poor Taggert, who had given his life. There was but one thing that he wanted—and she was denied him. He had definitely determined not to sacrifice her future happiness for his own. Her eyes tempted him sorely. They seemed to reproach him. He realized that she really loved him and hoped that he would ask for her hand. He also felt assured that Hakon would readily consent to his marrying her, if he were to remain upon Mars. But his first duty was to the professor and Taggert. He had been entrusted with a mission by the loyal-hearted reporter as the latter was dying. That mission he would fulfil to the limit of his power.

"If you will persist in a reward, sire, then let it be in *tynir*, the yellow metal which we call gold, and which is so plentiful here but so rare on our planet—or in *rahmobis*, gems of great value among our people, who know them as diamonds."

"It shall be as you desire," answered Hakon. "You shall have as much of both as can be carried in the *Sphere*."

Even as Robert spoke he saw the happiness fade from Zola's countenance. A look of gentle, pathetic reproach came into her eyes. She looked away as if to hide it from him.

It flashed to Robert's mind that perhaps, after all, they might not be able to return to the Earth. Would they find the *Sphere* intact? He thrilled guiltily, realizing that the answer to this question might yet make the princess his.

Slowly the procession threaded its

way back through the cheering populace toward the palace. Robert, astride Hakon's mount, rode beside Professor Palmer, while Zola and her father followed in one of the luxurious motor carriages.

Her strange quiet disturbed her father.

"My daughter is not contented?" he ventured anxiously.

"I am but fatigued," she replied, forcing a smile.

"Ah, of course you are, my dear. You must place yourself in the care of my physicians immediately upon our arrival at the palace."

Nevertheless, he hazarded a shrewd guess as to the real cause of her lassitude.

As for Zola, her heart was heavy. Did Robert care more for precious metals and gems than for her? She would gladly have gone to the utmost ends of the universe with him unhesitatingly, with implicit trusting, yet he seemed already to have forgotten his recent avowal of love. He had even avoided her eye guiltily.

23

AHEAD, Professor Palmer was listening sadly to Robert's tale of Taggert's death.

"Poor lad. We must carry his story back to his paper and the world. He forfeited his life for it. It is little enough."

"Little enough," Robert agreed. He thought of the sad message he would bear to the girl who would be waiting for Taggert.

They rode on in silence.

At Robert's suggestion upon their arrival at the palace, Hakon promptly issued orders for the *Sphere* to be sought out and brought back. A huge conveyance and two-score men were dispatched for this purpose.

Preparations were already under way for a great feasting to commence that night. An abundance of every kind of food produced by the little planet was prepared by skilled cooks. Every delicacy known to the Martians was procured for the occasion—even meat of the rare *mihida*. The *mihida* was the only animal still raised for food on Mars, on the pitifully small acreages of available pasturage irrigated from the ducts of precious water. None but the richest could enjoy this one available meat; and even those but occasionally. Many casks of *irel*, an excellent, mildly intoxicating vintage made from a fruit similar to our grape, were iced and tapped in readiness for the approaching festivities.

The great jubilee lasted not one night merely, but all of the next day and night, though Hakon and his immediate party, including Robert and the professor, withdrew with the first dawn.

Robert and Professor Palmer were each awarded a medal cross, highly prized by the Martians as an emblem of supreme valor. Their presentation was attended with much ceremony and a tremendous ovation. Seated between the princess and her father, Robert and the professor were the cynosure of all eyes and the envy of all the noblemen gathered.

The princess and Robert sat side by side, and their eyes were all for each other. Frequently their hands stole into each other's. Several times Robert caught Hakon watching them covertly, a quizzical smile on his face. What was behind that smiling mask Robert knew not, but he thought he detected a trace of sadness in it.

During the height of the celebration news arrived of the formal recognition of Hakon by the leaders of the dead emperor's government, as their new emperor. Convinced by the overwhelming, disastrous defeat of Kharnov's forces, and by the popular demand of the people at large, these leaders were glad to hail Hakon as their new chief and ruler.

It was on the day following their participation in the festivities that Robert was informed of the *Sphere's* discovery and safe return. Examination of it showed it to be unharmed.

Once more Robert wrestled with the stubborn engine which, in spite of the apparent absence of any mechanical defect, persistently refused to start. It finally developed that the petrol line from the tank to the carburetor was clogged with sediment. With this removed, the engine immediately ran as well as ever.

Hakon's chemists had finally succeeded in refining a considerable quantity of petrol—almost enough to fill the *Sphere's* reservoirs completely. The *Sphere* was in readiness at last for the return to the Earth.

The days following the public acclamation brought many proposals to the new emperor from the first nobles of the land for Zola's hand in marriage. This news Zola told Robert, and it was evident that she was wondering why he did not speak to her father for himself. The emperor, however, made no secret of the proposals. He even discussed them with Robert. Contrary to the general rule, his gratitude survived his successful acquisition of the throne, and his head remained unturned by the sudden fawning and praise from men who formerly had been his bitterest enemies. In spite of the high rank and the large fortunes of his rivals, it was becoming apparent to Robert that the emperor was inclined to favor a match between him and Zola. But he felt certain that there would be a stipulation in that event that he must not return to the Earth.

As the time decided upon between Robert and the professor for their departure drew closer, Robert decided to have a heart-to-heart talk with Hakon. Accordingly he sought an interview with him at the first opportunity.

He found him in excellent spirits. In fact, so carefree did the new monarch appear, that Robert hesitated to broach the subject; but concluding that it was a case of now or never he put his temerity aside.

Hakon heard him out calmly. It was apparent that he had been expecting this.

"My son," he said, finally, "this is no surprize to me. The days of my youth are not so distant that I do not recognize the symptoms of love." He sighed. "I can't blame you for loving her. She is her mother over again."

His fine eyes softened as he spoke of his deceased wife. Robert did not presume to interrupt his thoughts. He waited patiently while the emperor sat in silent reminiscence.

Presently Hakon resumed, putting memories from him with a visible effort.

"You are brave, my boy, and deserving of her great love—you see, she has already told me. Duty calls you back to your world, many, many leagues distant. But it is a younger, more luxuriant world. I will not selfishly deny her happiness, though she is my greatest treasure. I would that you could remain with us, but, if you must go, she may go with you if she wishes. Let her decide. I make but one condition; if she can not be happy in your world, bring her back to me if you can."

"I promise, sire," said Robert, touched too deeply at the emperor's sacrifice to say more for the moment.

A soft step caused them both to look up abruptly. Zola stood before them. She had stolen in while they were talking. Her eyes were brimming with misty happiness.

"I heard what you were saying, you dears," she murmured.

"And your decision, Zola?" Robert faltered.

She pressed a white hand to her

breast, swaying like a frail blade of grass.

"I must think—I must think," she said, faintly.

And she fled from the room.

24

THAT night brought no sleep to Robert. Torn between compassion for Zola's father, and fear that he himself would lose her, he tossed about incessantly. When finally dawn came he fell into a sleep of utter mental exhaustion.

When he opened his eyes it was with no recognition in them of anyone or anything. The delirium of fever had laid hold upon him. The severe strain and exertions of the past several days had reduced his vitality, and the mental anguish of the night following his interview with Hakon regarding Zola had proved the last straw.

For three days he remained delirious. During this time Zola nursed him almost constantly. It was with greatest difficulty that she was induced to snatch rest occasionally. And only to Professor Palmer would she relinquish her post.

Hakon came to see Robert twice daily. His own physicians were in continual attendance upon Robert. No effort was spared to bring about his recovery if possible. On the fourth day, with the crisis safely passed, Robert recovered his senses.

His first recognition was of Zola, to her unbounded delight. She was seated at his bedside. During his delirium he had spoken her name many times. At first he feared she might be another vision. He reached out to touch her and reassure himself of her reality, only to sink back weakly. She caught his hand.

"Do you know me now, Ro-bert, darling?" she whispered, with eager tenderness.

Robert pressed her hand happily, nodded, and promptly fell off into peaceful slumber—his first normal rest in many hours.

When he again opened his eyes he was stronger and able to take some nourishment, which Zola fed him. She had not left his bedside since his first return to consciousness early that same morning. By the doctors' orders she would not permit him to talk. But for lovers there are other means of communication than mere words. Both were infinitely happy.

The effects of Zola's continued vigil of the past three days and nights were visible in her face. Only at Robert's insistence, and for fear that he would excite himself into a relapse, did she finally consent to take to her bed for sleep. She slept the entire afternoon and night without waking, and rose feeling greatly refreshed but with bitter reproachment on her lips for those who had permitted her to sleep so long.

By this time Robert, much improved, was allowed to talk. Zola perched herself on the edge of his bed.

"We are to be married as soon as you are up," she announced, bending and kissing him as he started to splutter some inane reply. The emperor, coming in at the moment, laughed outright and made his exit quickly.

"And I shall see and know that wonderful world of yours," she continued.

Her calm assertion swept Robert's last scruples away. In his heart was a song of joy, and his boyish enthusiasm and anticipation ran riot. The thought of transplanting this desert flower from an unlovely, withered planet to his own luxuriant world was a prospect of boundless, delightful possibilities! It would seem a wonderland to her. She would be the happiest and most appreciative girl alive—and his!

"You bet you shall, sweetheart,"

he agreed. "You shall see our wonderful, rugged mountains, and beautiful green valleys; the winding rivers, the vast oceans, and the great lakes of water, the very drops of which are so precious here. Our clouds, the mysterious storms that will frighten you with their magnificence, and the silver rain; all these wonders and many more shall be yours."

"Do you really have big bodies and rivers of water, open and unprotected from the sun's rays? Why doesn't it evaporate, or sink into the soil and become lost?"

"You shall see, sweetheart. You shall ride upon oceans more vast than your deserts, where nothing but rolling water can be seen."

Zola shook her head in perplexity and with a certain measure of doubt. All this seemed virtually impossible to her. Only her implicit confidence in Robert enabled her to believe, and even in that belief she was unconsciously prone to reserve. Well, she would see what she would see. No doubt it was a wonderful world; but ——. However, she was a diplomat.

"Truly these are wonderful things you tell me of, my love. I am wild to see them."

At this point they were interrupted by the doctor.

"You children must be quiet awhile now. I forbid my patient to excite himself by talking any more till this afternoon."

And as this doctor was an autocratic soul, accustomed to having his way, they were forced to forego their conversation till later. In the heart of each, however, there was a bewildering flutter of joy and happiness.

25

During the next few days Robert grew rapidly stronger, and soon was permitted to be up and around.

Taggert's body had been recovered, and now rested in state within one of the royal vaults, where it had been placed with great reverence by the Martians at the command of the emperor. Elaborate and touching were the ceremonies which attended the procedure. Robert had not been able to attend the ceremonies, but Professor Palmer, accompanied by the emperor and Princess Zola, witnessed them together.

Resigned to their determination to return to their own planet, taking his beloved daughter with them, the emperor bent his efforts toward loading the *Sphere* with both *tynir* and *rahmobis* in large quantities.

Of the *tynir* it was simply a question of how much the *Sphere* would be able to lift safely. More than two and a half tons of the precious metal, in small ingots and in heavy sacks, were stacked on the floor of the main chamber—virgin gold, every ounce of it.

The supply of *rahmobis*, or diamonds, though not so plentiful, was a far greater treasure even than the precious yellow metal, although most of these were in the rough. They averaged in size from half a carat to several carats, with here and there a specimen running ten or fifteen carats. Of these assorted, uncut stones there were nine sacks, each about the size of a five-pound sack of sugar. In addition there were several packets of finely cut and polished gems, the product of skilled Martian cutters. These varied approximately from a quarter of a carat to two carats, but a dozen or more fine stones weighed more than ten carats each! Some excellent emeralds and rubies were included among the cut stones, but only a few, because, while the white diamonds were quite plentiful on Mars, the green and the pigeon-red varieties were very rare. Truly the *Sphere* was to carry back a ransom of kings!

But of all this treasure none was so precious to Robert as his princess.

With Robert's complete recovery, a great pageant was arranged in which the emperor, princess and all the nobles were to participate. Robert and Professor Palmer were invited to ride with Zola and her father in the procession.

Elaborate preparations were made for this event which was to typify the recent victory and the reunion of all factions, and the gratitude of the Martians for the timely aid by their visitors from Earth. Great ornamental arches were hurriedly built, and large quantities of the various kinds of Martian flowers were accumulated in readiness for the event. The gathering of these flowers was no small task, since the restricted growing areas of the waning planet permitted of but little deviation from the grim task of producing enough food to sustain its populace.

The pageant was also to serve another purpose. At its termination the emperor was to announce the giving of his daughter's hand in marriage to Robert and her subsequent departure for Earth with him. Some resistance was anticipated from various nobles, particularly those who were eligible for Zola's hand. It was because of a possible demonstration against the princess' departure that the emperor, with excellent foresight and admirable sacrifice, had commanded that the wedding take place quietly at the palace immediately after the pageant, and that the *Sphere* start on its long journey with his most precious possession immediately afterward.

The day of the great pageant dawned with the same wonderful brilliance that heralded 680 of the 687 days of the Martian year.

All preparations of the royal party for the pageant were completed before noon. At midday Robert and the professor partook of a simple luncheon with Zola and her father. With the specter of separation so near, conversation languished, and it was with real effort that the professor maintained at least a semblance of cheerfulness within the little group through his persistent but tactful patter of small talk.

Early in the afternoon the nobles began to arrive. Within an hour the assembly of plumed and gayly dressed riders had formed in marching order, and with a great clattering of hoofs rode through the big archway leading from the palace terrace to the main road.

A company of guards led. The emperor and his daughter, accompanied by Robert and Professor Palmer, followed them. Behind them came the chief nobles of the great empire.

From the time of the earliest formation on the palace terrace, it became apparent that some peculiar unrest pervaded the assembly. This grew more tense as the time passed, and was only temporarily relieved when the column had ridden out from the palace. Several times as his mount shied, Robert fancied he surprized secret communications between certain of the nobles. The ostensibly unconcerned looks upon their countenances, and their abrupt cessation of whispered confidences as he caught their eye, somehow forced an unpleasant conviction upon Robert that these communications not only concerned the emperor and his party, but presaged evil for them. He wondered if, in some manner, advance news of his impending marriage to the princess and of their intended departure had got abroad. Anticipation of such information likely would produce resentment among the young-bloods who had hoped to obtain the princess' hand themselves, and they might endeavor to stir up trouble to prevent the match and the departure of the princess. He determined to keep a

sharp outlook for any sign of treachery.

Into the main thoroughfare they swung. Here they halted briefly while the rest of the procession promptly formed behind. Then they moved on again toward the heart of the city.

Soon they passed beneath artificial arches over flower-strewn streets lined with dense crowds of eager-eyed, cheering Martians who were gathered to greet their new emperor and to see his mysterious aids from the planet Earth, who had put their powerful enemies to rout at the eleventh hour. Robert could not suppress a feeling of exhilaration as the deafening acclamations of the populace swelled about them. Fully half the demonstration was for the professor and himself. He glanced at the princess—*his* princess—riding close beside him, her lovely cheeks aglow with excitement. Her eyes were turned toward him in rapt admiration. Small wonder that Robert's head swam a bit with pride and keen enjoyment in this, his moment of supreme triumph and popularity. The professor, too, seemed not without his appreciation of the moment.

The procession finally reached the Galpræ, a huge amphitheater situated in the eastern end of the city. Here, flanked by his guardsmen on one side and the nobles on the other, the emperor spoke briefly to the people. Robert, the professor, and Zola occupied positions of honor near him.

The people listened to his speech with marked respect and interest to its conclusion, when they burst into wild cheering lasting many minutes. The emperor held up his hand for quiet, till finally the demonstration ceased. Then, calmly, distinctly, he announced his daughter's early nuptials and departure with Robert.

For some seconds after this statement a deep silence reigned. Then, suddenly, one of the nobles rose to his feet!

He pointed dramatically at Robert and Professor Palmer.

"Shall we permit these Earth-beings to carry off our own princess to another planet? Shall we permit her to wed one of these common beings while the best, the noblest, blood of all Mars is offered for her hand? *No!* A thousand times no! Our emperor's better judgment has been swayed by some strange influence of these beings. Brethren, let us not stand by idly and permit this outrage!"

As if by prearranged signal, about half the nobles sprang to their feet. Drawing their sabers, they rushed upon the little group about Robert.

At the same moment, pandemonium seemed to have broken bounds. The fickle audience in the great enclosure leapt to their feet as one and surged forward, shouting madly! The guardsmen, who fortunately were all picked men and loyal to the core, dashed forward to protect their emperor and his guests, but were prevented from joining them by the resistance of the immediate group of traitorous nobles. A few of the noblemen who were loyal joined the guardsmen in the instant mêlée.

Though Robert was on the alert for something of this sort, the suddenness of it left him momentarily aghast. There seemed no escape. His saber and the emperor's flashed from their scabbards together. The next instant the professor and they with two guardsmen who had somehow managed to hew their way through to them, had formed a ring of steel round Zola. Against this vicious circle the furious noblemen charged.

For minutes that seemed hours, the unequal combat raged about these five staunch men and the trembling princess. The guardsmen and loyal noblemen were more than holding their own with the larger part of the rebels. But the little group in the

midst of it all was facing annihilation before aid could reach them. Already Hakon was wounded, while one of the guardsmen was down. Robert, too, was wounded, though fortunately not yet seriously.

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SUDDENLY Robert felt the pavement give way beneath his feet. The next instant he was precipitated downward. A hard surface seemed to rush upward and strike him. He sprawled painfully. Then darkness!

For a moment he believed oddly that he had just sustained a blow which had knocked him unconscious, mistaking the sudden quiet and darkness for oblivion in his bewilderment.

Abruptly the mantle of blackness surrounding him magically dropped away. As he scrambled stiffly to his feet he perceived that he stood with others within a tunnel of masonry dimly lit by a series of incandescent lights. An exclamation of relief burst from his lips as he saw Zola sitting on the floor a few feet away. She gave a glad little cry as she recognized him. He quickly helped her to her feet. At the same moment he saw Hakon and Professor Palmer, and, with them, the surviving guard who had fought so valiantly. On the pavement lay one of their late enemies, strangely still.

"This is a secret passage leading to the palace," Hakon explained hurriedly. "Its existence and the automatic trap-door entrance above us with its rebound feature alone has preserved our lives thus far. Lead on, Dyarkon."

The guard addressed, obediently led the way down the passage, the others following. Above, faint sounds of the conflict still raging seemed far away. Zola placed her hand in Robert's trustfully. They had proceeded several rods when the emperor, who was second in lead, swayed uncertainly. He would have fallen but for Robert's timely assistance. Zola also rushed to his side with a startled cry.

"Ah, my children, I fear I am too badly wounded to go on. Leave me and escape while you may."

"We go on only with you, sire," said Robert, firmly.

Gently he and Professor Palmer lifted the protesting monarch between them. In this manner they resumed their march down the long passage, led by the faithful Dyarkon. Zola followed closely in the rear.

In silence they made their way through the long tunnel beneath the city's streets. Except for the shuffle of their feet, an oppressive, death-like stillness reigned. At intervals Hakon begged them futilely to put him down and hurry on to safety without him.

Though the passage led in almost direct line from the amphitheater to the palace, it was a considerable distance. The emperor was no slight burde and Robert's muscles ached with the continued strain. In spite of his years, however, the professor seemed to be bearing his part of the monarch's weight without great effort.

A touch on his shoulder caused Robert to look round sharply. Zola was directly behind him, her hand upon his arm

"Wait!" she whispered, glancing apprehensively over her shoulder.

Robert and Professor Palmer halted. Dyarkon, proceeding a few paces farther, also stopped as he perceived they were not following.

"What is it?" Robert asked. His gaze followed hers down the dim passage stretching off behind them in ghostly emptiness. He failed to discern any cause for her uneasiness.

"Listen! Did you not hear footsteps?"

They all listened tensely. Only the beating of their own hearts disturbed the deadly underground quiet. An icy touch on his neck caused Robert

to start. But he discovered that it was only a drop of water, fallen from the sweating roof. Here, possibly, was the origin of the sound which had startled Zola. Every little sound within the long tunnel was magnified a hundred times by the reverberation from the dead walls. The shuffling of a foot brought muffled shufflings from the farthest recesses of the passage, dying in soft, throbbing whispers that slipped from wall to wall faintly.

"I thought I heard footsteps following us," Zola explained a trifle shamefacedly, but with a little pucker of perplexity on her forehead.

"Just the echoes, my dear," said her father.

They resumed their march toward the palace. His ears keenly alert for sounds of pursuit, Robert, too, fancied several times that he heard cautious footsteps following in the distance; but he finally concluded that what he heard was nothing more than the countless rustling echoes from their own footsteps.

At last they reached a winding stairway. Up this they followed Dyarkon till it brought them to another level stretch of paving.

At a command from the emperor the guard stopped and fumbled along the base of the right wall. A door in the masonry swung outward. Through this they all followed quickly, closing the door behind them.

They now stood within another passage exactly like the first, but running at right angles to it. Was it imagination that caused Robert to believe he heard a scurry of footsteps along the passage they had just quit?

"Did you hear?" murmured the princess, clutching Robert's arm.

He nodded. Then he was right. They had just quit the other passage in time!

The little procession moved on again. Another short flight of stairs brought them to a stop before a blank wall at the end of the passage. Here Dyarkon repeated his former performances and the wall opened.

A brilliant stream of sunlight burst upon them. The abrupt contrast with the dim glow of the passage all but blinded them for a few seconds.

An involuntary exclamation burst from Robert's lips. The *Sphere* rested within fifty feet of them! They were standing inside the broad wall of the palace courtyard!

Instantly his mind formed a plan of action. They would make a dash for the *Sphere*. Once safely inside they could rise quickly and observe the actions of the crowds. Then they could lay their plans at leisure.

Rapidly he outlined his plan to the others, who acquiesced at once. If their pursuers had already reached the palace they had not a moment to lose. The courtyard was yet closer.

HAKON was able to stand, though his wounds had left him pitifully weak. Dyarkon and the professor now assisted him while Robert hurried ahead to open the trap-door entrance into the *Sphere*.

As they emerged from the wall a loud outcry greeted them. Without stopping to ascertain its source they hurried toward the *Sphere* with all possible speed. Fortunately the trap operated readily, and a few seconds later they were all safely shut within.

The outcry was now explained. Into the courtyard from the palace poured a score of nobles with drawn sabers, shouting for them to stop.

Robert jerked the control over. The *Sphere* leapt from the ground with such sudden force that all except Robert and the staunch Dyarkon were thrown to the floor. A minute later they were soaring far above the heads of their late pursuers.

"Phew! Close shaves are getting to be our specialty," exclaimed Robert, recovering his breath for the first

time in many minutes. "Now for our observations and conference."

He checked the *Sphere's* ascent and turned to the others.

Zola was already busily binding her father's wound. Professor Palmer had just brought her some water and a supply of bandages from the first-aid chest. Fortunately, though Hakon was weak from loss of blood, his wound was found not to be serious.

Hakon was staring intently groundward from his position by a window. Following his gaze, Robert saw a dense mob round the palace. Even at this height he could hear the Martians' cries faintly. Evidently the rebel noblemen had succeeded well in working the masses up in revolt.

Sadly Hakon viewed the disorder below. It was now clear that it would not be safe for him to return.

"Let us all go to Earth, my dear father," said Zola. "There we can be happy together."

The fugitive ruler pondered for many minutes, while the others maintained a respectful silence. Finally he sighed resignedly. A faint smile played over his countenance as he turned to his daughter.

"Ah, my dear, I was a very foolish old man to think of letting you go alone. We shall, as you say, be far happier together. We shall have riches and contentment in this world of Robert's—if, indeed, he and Professor Palmer will share a little of their fortune with us." He smiled as he nodded toward the bullion stacked on the chamber floor.

"You are the spokesman, Robert," chuckled the professor.

"The treasure is yours and Zola's, sire, now that you are with us," said Robert.

"I have given it to you and Professor Palmer, my boy, and it remains yours, except for what small portion you might wish to assign me—and Dyarkon, if he decides to go with us. As for Zola, she will share with you as your bride. What say you, Dyarkon—do you wish to go with us?"

"Oh, sire, I shall go if you desire it; but I was to have been married shortly. My heart is there." He pointed below.

"Then you shall be permitted to return, my man. Accept this, my present to your bride; and may you have great happiness." He handed the guard a string of beautiful emeralds which he had been wearing.

The faithful Martian was speechless with gratitude.

"I suggest, then, that the treasure be divided into four equal parts," said the professor, presently; "one quarter for each of us. There is sufficient wealth here to make every one of us overwhelmingly rich on Earth."

So it was agreed.

The question of provisions was the next consideration. At Hakon's orders, large quantities of evaporated fruits and vegetables had previously been placed within the cupboards of the *Sphere*. A goodly quantity of the *Sphere's* original supply of food tablets, etc., remained. Fortunately, too, the oxygen tanks contained enough gas to purify the air in the *Sphere* for a long while. It only was necessary to replenish their water supply, when they could also leave Dyarkon.

The latter task was not so easy as it sounds. For there are no convenient, open streams on Mars. They must either chance landing at some power station or farm, or fly to one of the poles and there obtain water from one of the giant reservoirs. The elements at the nearest pole being very treacherous at this season, it was decided to chance a visit to some farmhouse.

A hurried trip was accordingly made to a small farm, a sufficient distance from the scene of the rebellion to be reasonably safe. Here the astonished farmer, who had not yet heard of the rebellion and who did

not even recognize the emperor and the princess, eagerly helped these distinguished visitors to fill the water tanks of the mysterious *Sphere*. This the farmer had heard of, and both he and his wife gazed upon it with mingled wonder and dismay. Afterward they followed it with their eyes until it had passed beyond their vision. This farmer, and his wife and Dyarkon, had the distinction of being the persons on Mars who last saw their emperor; though the two first named did not know this till Dyarkon presently told them.

After the filling of the water tanks, Robert steered the *Sphere* straight toward the distant pale star which he and Professor Palmer knew was the Earth. Despite their anticipation and resignation, Zola and her father gazed back upon their erstwhile world in silent awe, and not without some sadness, long after it had ceased to be more than a mere ocher and rose disk.

Through the eternal night sped the infinitesimal world with its population of four. And through the long hours of Robert's watches, Zola was at his side always. Their love was as an immortal thing, born of space and eternity. Hand in hand they fled across the universe to their future world of promise.

Profiting by their previous experience with gravitation, or rather, an absence of gravitation and stabilization, Robert and the professor properly manipulated the disk and gyrostats on this trip, avoiding the danger which had so nearly proved their undoing before. Robert prevented also the recurrence of another unpleasant experience, by cutting short pieces of stout cord, one for each of them, and particularly cautioned Zola and her father to tie them about their bodies at night and secure the other end to a rung or some other stationary object at a safe distance from the whirling gyrostats.

It was not long after that they had a taste of air-floating, and the cords proved their worth. This sensation, the continued sunshine out of a black sky and other phenomena, were all new to Zola and her father. The time passed rapidly.

A deck of playing cards was got out and Hakon and Zola were initiated into the mysteries of the Earthmen's card games, which they learned readily and seemed to enjoy keenly. They then proceeded to show Robert and Professor Palmer some of their own games. These, being played with cards not greatly different from our own, were easily adapted to the cards they were using. In fact, one of their games, called *Agahr*, was virtually identical with our own simple game of casino.

So it did not seem long ere they were within a day's journey of the Earth. Not a single mishap had delayed their progress so far. Barring the unexpected, they should be but a day longer in returning than the period covered by the trip to Mars, in spite of the considerably increased distance between the two planets by this time. Nearly three months had elapsed since the departure from the Earth.

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As the Earth's disk expanded before their eyes, Robert pointed out to Zola and Hakon the outlines of the continents and oceans, the mountain ranges and rivers. Their genuine wonder and delightful anticipation were a source of keen enjoyment to both the professor and Robert.

"It surpasses my wildest imagination to vision an expanse of water so vast that one can not see its boundaries!" exclaimed Hakon, excitedly. "I can scarcely contain myself till we shall actually see these wonders with our own eyes."

"And think, Father, of the great forests of trees where one can really

get lost; the mysterious clouds in the sky; the rushing rivers and waterfalls! Oh, how could I have thought of letting you stay away from all this! How happy we can be, can't we, Ro-bert?"

"Indeed we can, sweetheart," he replied, with a feeling that his measure of delight was far more than he deserved.

Closer, closer drew the big world—his world and hers. Its great disk swelled and swelled, until it was no longer a disk but a vast expanse stretching away in all directions.

Robert had reduced the *Sphere's* speed until they approached the surface, now less than fifty miles away, at about the speed of a fast passenger train. As they drew closer he reduced their speed still further. A big cloud bank obscured their view of the Earth's surface now, but he knew that they were above the Atlantic. He had already given the *Sphere* the spin of the swiftly revolving Earth, before entering its envelope of atmosphere. They now drifted serenely, high above the clouds.

As they slowly drew near the cloud bank, Zola made a natural mistake of thinking it the ocean, till Robert told her different. Her astonishment and delight were great as they plunged through the fluffy mist and emerged above the water. A big sea was running, and Robert permitted the *Sphere* to drop within a hundred yards of the tall crests.

The continual rolling of the water mystified Hakon and Zola. This was explained to them with some difficulty. Robert opened two of the *Sphere's* ports, for the first time since leaving Mars. They all filled their lungs gratefully with the keen, salty air as it blew in upon them. The main force of the gale was not felt, however, because the *Sphere* was being driven before it. Once an eccentric gust sucked the *Sphere* down abruptly. A mountainous wave, rearing hungrily toward the big metal ball, slapped forcibly against it, causing it to rebound high into the air with a suddenness that upset everyone. After that Robert kept a safe distance above the seething waters.

For a while they scudded swiftly along under the hypnotic spell of the restless sea. Its hissing turbulence was a source of continual awe and wonder to their guests. Finally Robert closed the ports and sped the *Sphere* toward the Jersey coast.

It was in the early afternoon when they passed over the coast line. Here their appearance was first noted and news of the *Sphere's* safe return flashed all over the world. Later, as they sailed over New York, a droning of many whistles heralded their arrival, while a blimp, a big seaplane, and several airplanes glided and cavorted over, under and round them.

"*Sphere* ahoy!" shouted one venturesome chap, a reporter on the *Times*, as he whizzed by, a dozen feet away, in a two-passenger airplane. "What news?"

But the drone of his engine drowned a possible answer as the distance between them widened rapidly.

Leaving Manhattan, Robert steered the *Sphere* toward L——— and Professor Palmer's estate. This was at the latter's request, and in response to his cordial invitation to Robert and both their guests to make their home with him for the present.

Their arrival at the Palmer estate found the place already overrun with reporters and photographers in anticipation of their reurn there. Even the resourceful Henry could not stem the tide. Motion pictures of them all were run off and rushed to headquarters for early projection upon the silver screen all over the world.

Hakon, and Zola, more charming than ever, both accepted the situation with jolly good nature. Praises of the beautiful maiden from Mars were

many, and their sincerity was reflected in the headlines and articles which appeared as by magic in the afternoon papers throughout the country the very day of their arrival.

The party rested at the Palmer estate for several days. Many were the delightful strolls which Robert and Zola took in the lovely grounds. The soft, luxuriant grass under foot, the tall trees, the beautiful shrubbery and flowers were as a fairyland to the princess, with her fairy prince at her side. As for Robert, he was in a veritable seventh heaven.

The emperor and Professor Palmer, now great cronies, were constantly together. Hakon never tired of the professor's tales of the Earth's resources, its history and people; and of our long observation of and conjectures regarding his own planet, Mars.

Negotiations were opened with a firm of expert diamond cutters in New York for the cutting and polishing of the stones brought from Mars. Their representatives, escorted by a heavy guard, arrived promptly and departed with the first valuable consignment of the rough gems.

The balance of the treasure, in bullion and stones, had been safely deposited in the vaults of three different banks for greater safety. The bullion, however, was rapidly converted into cash and deposited in equal shares to the individual credit of the four adventurers and one other person. This person was Taggert's sweetheart, a Miss Sarah Daugherty, who had waited faithfully for the valiant reporter's return. By mutual consent, a fifth and equal share of the treasure was allotted her. Taggert's mother, poor woman, had not lived to see the return of the *Sphere*. She had contracted pneumonia and passed away a month before her son's death. One of the first things Robert had done upon his return was to seek Mrs. Taggert and Miss Daugherty, after delivering Taggert's notes to the *Morning Chronicle* with an additional report on the events following the lion-hearted reporter's death. He obtained the publishers' ready consent to turn over all salaries and bonus due Taggert, to Miss Daugherty.

From the moment of their return, Robert and Professor Palmer were lionized by the world. Eminent scientists from everywhere sought interviews with them. Even the former opponent of the Palmer theories, Professor Margard, came to Professor Palmer with sincere congratulations. They were besieged by learned societies to lecture at gatherings for their enlightenment. Capitalists and promoters begged them to consider offers of enormous sums for their patents on the *Sphere's* remarkable gravity-defying principles.

Construction of a huge device for flashing messages to Mars by means of reflection of the sun's rays was commenced in the Sahara Desert. A code furnished by the emperor was to be used. Though wireless had been considered, the enormous distance was judged to be too great to make that method of communication practicable, even with the most powerful apparatus then conceivable.

"They'll be betting on each other's stock markets soon," laughed Henry, when he heard of the project.

On the day of Robert's and Zola's wedding, the emperor presented his daughter with a magnificent, perfect ruby, which he had had set, and hung in a pendant, with the connivance of the professor. The gem was uniquely cut, similarly to what we know as table-cut. He also presented them with a packet of three remarkable stones, in the rough, which he had secretly brought with him. One of these was a black diamond of twenty-one carats; another was a white diamond of slightly larger size.

The third stone was also a white diamond, but of astounding size. It was several times larger than the famous Koh-i-noor; it even exceeded in size the Great Mogul in the rough, as it balanced at a trifle under 1,115 carats! Properly cut and polished, without the unfortunate bungling which both the Koh-i-noor and the Great Mogul had suffered, it should weigh considerably more than these two famous gems together, they weighing 106 and 280 carats respectively after their final cutting.

"It should be named," said the professor, when shown this enormous stone. "What are you going to call it?"

"Let us call it the *Ragnarok*, which means 'the twilight of the gods and the doomsday of the world'—in memory of the waning world from which it came," suggested Robert, after some thought.

And so it was named.

The little vine-clad church in the village saw the wedding of Robert and Zola on a delightful, soft autumn afternoon a few days later. Her father gave her away, and Professor Palmer was the best man. Futile attempts at fittingly describing the glorious vision presented by the princess were attempted. But perhaps none was more apt than that ventured by the professor's housekeeper, a kindly soul, who had helped Zola choose her dainty bridal gown and charming trousseau. "A true daughter of the gods," was the rather surprizing expression of this normally prosaic woman.

More surprizing, however, may have been the choice of these two young beings of the scene of their honeymoon. Not a tour of Europe, nor of the natural wonders of our own great country. They simply disappeared into the great Canadian wilderness. There, if one could have followed them, they might have been discovered happily paddling a well-loaded canoe up a winding stream of still, friendly, wooded shores. Above, the clear blue sky rivaled the crystal transparency of the rippling stream. A hawk drifted across the ribbon of blue and was lost again beyond the maze of tall pines. Somewhere a woodpecker drummed stoutly upon a dead limb.

Softly, easily, the slim craft rounded a bend to the even thrust of two pairs of vigorous, willing young arms. Like the hawk, it was soon lost to view—lost in a twilight wilderness of love and peace.

[THE END]

WE ARE going to turn The Eyrie this month entirely over to you, the readers. We feel that our stories are satisfying you, as each month shows a steady increase in circulation over the preceding months; but it is only through your continued interest in the magazine that we can keep it in accord with your wishes. So if you like any stories particularly well, let us know which ones. What is your favorite story in this issue? If there are any stories that you do not like, be sure to let us know; for WEIRD TALES belongs to its readers, and we want to give you the kind of stories that you like. And we are unable to tell what stories you like unless you let us know. Send in your suggestions as to what kind of stories you think WEIRD TALES should publish. Address your letter to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Robert E. Howard, of Cross Plains, Texas, writes concerning Mr. Quinn's stories of Jules de Grandin: "These are sheer masterpieces. The little Frenchman is one of those characters who live in fiction. I look forward with pleasurable anticipations to further meetings with him."

C. S. Baker, of Washington, D. C., writes: "WEIRD TALES is the only magazine that I buy regularly, and every story is a thriller."

August Derleth, Jr., of Sauk City, Wisconsin, writes: "Is it possible to get more stories by H. P. Lovecraft and to have one of David Baxter's nature tales in every issue? I find Frank Owen's tales delightfully fantastic, while Greye La Spina's stories are gems of sinister menace. I wish to repeat E. L. Middleton's plea for 'a few old-fashioned ghost stories' and the reprint of Algernon Blackwood's *The Willows.*"

Paul Hern, of Manhattan, Kansas, writes: "I greatly enjoyed the bat story by David Baxter, *Nomads of the Night*. Get more of these."

Mrs. Lila Le Clair, of Templeton, Massachusetts, writes: "I never could get really interested in the popular magazines until I was in a store and happened to see WEIRD TALES on the stand. So I decided to try it, thinking I'd probably read a few pages and cast it aside. But believe me, every page was a thriller, and such chills of delighted horror as I had never had before chased up and down my spine. Give us more blood-curdling and ghost stories, and keep the magazine as it is, for it surely is a crackerjack."

"More pseudo-scientific stories and more H. G. Wells stories," writes Cecil Fuller, of Tulare, California. "I hope you will use *The Time Machine* as one of your reprints, as it is the best weird story Wells has written."

Miss Alton Davis, of Memphis, Tennessee, writes: "Seabury Quinn's

story, *The Horror on the Links*, kept me hanging in suspense to the end, with a creepy chill up and down my back. But, dear editor, don't spoil your magazine with humorous tales like *The Wicked Flea*. Your magazine stands for the creepy, hair-raising stories, so please keep it that way. Give us more werewolf stories like *The Werewolf of Ponkert*—that was a winner."

R. P. Reebel, of Edinburgh, Pennsylvania, writes to The Eyrie: "To my mind the best story I have ever read in your magazine, in fact I might say the best story I have ever read, was *The Wind That Tramps the World*, by Frank Owen. I think this story deserves to live; in fact it is a classic That one story, short as it was, was worth the price of a year's subscription to WEIRD TALES." The story appeared in last April's issue.

Harry Reade, of Easton, Pennsylvania, writes to The Eyrie: "Give us some more stories of adventures under the sea, on other planets, or in strange, out-of-the-way places on the earth, like *The Lure of Atlantis* in last April's issue, *Planet Paradise*, and *The Sunken Land*. I enjoy this kind of story more than any other. Don't forget, also, a few more scientific tales like B. Wallis's *The Abysmal Horror*."

Greye La Spina, herself a popular writer of weird tales, writes from Brooklyn: "Can not help sending you a line to tell you how fine I consider the December issue. It is one of the best, if not the best, you've put out yet. The magazine gets better as it grows older. Mr. Quinn's story is corking. Lieutenant Burks' story is deeply touching, and a most original conception Mr. Long has created a horrible monster in *The Sea Thing*, and made it appear logical, which is a feat. Mr. Colter, with *The Deadly Amanita*, has touched on mental processes with great delicacy and sureness. Mr. H. G. Wells is an established writer, but I do not think he stands out in this issue of WEIRD TALES any more than do these other writers of less prominence, which is saying something. Congratulations."

H. P. Lovecraft, another favorite author, writes: "I have lately read your December issue, and believe the general qualitative level is kept commendably high—we don't find any of the frank crudities that marked the earlier issues. Long's *The Sea Thing* strikes me as the best tale, with Owen's *The Fan* as a good second."

Helen L. Keys, of New York City, writes: "I am a great admirer of your magazine and the stories you publish. Most editors seem to fear to give their readers an unusual or gruesome story. You are to be congratulated on your courage. The name of H. G. Wells on the cover caught my attention this month and I bought your magazine. I found several stories equal to or better than the Wells story. Mr. Quinn's long story was fine, and also *The Waning of a World*. And what a horrible, gruesome, wonderful story was *The Sea Thing!* Please give us more by Mr. Quinn and Mr. Long."

Carl F. Ester, of San Francisco, writes to The Eyrie: "As a constant reader of WEIRD TALES, I beg to take this liberty and your valuable time to thank you for your delightful stories in the past and the ones to come. But of all stories I ever read, the one I most appreciated is the one by Lieutenant Arthur J. Burks in the December issue: *When the Graves Were Opened*, the most perfect, clear, clean and mystifying story I have read for many days and here is one reader's appreciation of it in that I wish the author all success possible, and may he continue this kind of writing."

Walter Sammis, of Placerville, California, writes: "Honest, I don't know what I would do if I did not have W. T. to look forward to each month

I read the first issue ever published, and that led to the others, so now I am a WEIRD TALES addict. My favorites are stories like *The Eternal Conflict* and stories of the worlds beyond. I think it's just about impossible to improve this magazine."

Lewis F. Ball, of Havre de Grace, Maryland, writes to The Eyrie: "I am surely an enthusiastic reader of WEIRD TALES and think it is the best magazine on the market, only it isn't published often enough for me. My favorite story in the December issue is *When the Graves Were Opened.* It is so different from the ordinary stories, and so well told. But for goodness' sake publish some more stories by H. P. Lovecraft very soon or I'll die of disappointment. My favorite authors are H. P. Lovecraft, Arthur J. Burks, and C. M. Eddy, Jr. Keep WEIRD TALES weird."

Dr. C. R. Scheffer, of Delavan, Wisconsin, writes: "The short little yarn, *The Fading Ghost,* has real literary merit, and one is led to the finish believing the 'ghost' is the real thing, to meet with a genuine surprize. It's a cleverly conceived idea."

Arthur Thatcher, author of the Teeheemen stories, writes: "I have been intending every month to write and express my admiration for the constantly increasing excellence of the material appearing in WEIRD TALES. The past three months have been splendid in the superlative degree, in my estimation. *The Tenants of Broussac* is one of the best tales I have read in a long time. *The Horror on the Links* was another good one, and *The Gargoyle* was excellent."

Harold S. Farnese, of Los Angeles, writes: "*The Waning of a World* I have enjoyed tremendously, but with the introduction of earthlike intrigues and earthlike beings on Mars, the climax is somewhat passed and the story seems to pass into the channel of other love-tales. The story by Louise Garwood in last month's issue was wonderful. Somebody ought to tell this lady that she has talents to write a good play, for in all her stories the dramatic element stands foremost. In my opinion she is a born playwright. I vote for *The Sea Thing* by Long and the reprint of *What Was It?* by O'Brien as the best stories in the December issue. Keep the magazine weird."

A reader from Fort Sam Houston, Texas, who signs himself with a flock of initials, J. A. E. B. P., writes: "I have been trying for the last five years or so to find some fiction magazine that would suit my taste. Of course I have tried every magazine on the market, and each in its turn has managed to hold my interest for a while. But the sameness of the stories from week to week was appalling. When you have read one, you have read practically all. It wasn't until last April, when walking into a news stand, that I found WEIRD TALES. It was new to me, so I thought I would give it a trial. Well, that first number got me interested, and since that time I have not missed a copy. I have no intention of missing a copy as long as I can dig up twenty-five cents. It is the only magazine from which I get any real satisfaction. Let us have more from the pen of Seabury Quinn, H. Thompson Rich, H. G. Wells and Eli Colter. As the best of your writers, Seabury Quinn has my vote by about ten laps."

Well, readers, in the voting for favorite story in the December issue, three stories lead all the rest, but they are so nearly even in votes that it would be unfair to name one and leave out the other two. Here they are: 1. *The Sea Thing,* by Frank Belknap Long, Jr.; 2. *The Tenants of Broussac,* by Seabury Quinn; 3. *When the Graves Were Opened,* by Lieutenant Arthur J. Burks.

The Isle of Missing Ships

(Continued from page 192)

ful retainers for the purpose of attending my women, but you two come into my hands providentially. Both of you are surgeons—you shall perform the necessary operations on each other. It is a matter of indifference to me which of you operates first—you may draw straws for the privilege, if you wish—but it is my will that you do this thing, and my will is law on this island."

Both de Grandin and I looked at him in speechless horror, but he took no notice of our amazement. "You may think you will refuse," he told us, "but you will not. Captain Van Thun, of the Dutch steamer *Van Damm,* and his first mate were offered the same chance and refused it. They chose to interview a little pet I keep about the premises as an alternative; but when the time for the interview came both would gladly have reconsidered their decision. This house is the one place in the world where a white man must keep his word, willy-nilly. Both of them were obliged to carry out their bargain to the letter—and I can not say the prestige of the pure Caucasian breed was strengthened by the way they did it.

"Now, I will give you gentlemen a greater opportunity for deliberation than I gave the Dutchmen. You shall first be allowed to see my pet, then decide whether you will accept my offer or not. But I warn you beforehand, whatever decision you make must be adhered to.

"Come." He turned to the two armed Malays who stood behind his chair and barked an order. Instantly de Grandin and I were covered by their pistols, and the scowling faces behind the firearms' sights told us we might expect no quarter if the order to fire were given.

"Come," Goonong Besar—or Richardson—repeated imperiously, "walk ahead, you two, and remember, the first attempt either of you makes to escape will mean a bullet through his brain."

We marched down a series of identical corridors as bewildering as the labyrinth of Crete, mysterious stone doors thudding shut behind us from time to time, other doors swinging open in the solid walls as our guards pressed cunningly-concealed springs in the walls or floor. Finally we brought up on a sort of colonnaded porch, a tiled footpath bordered with a low stone parapet from which a row of carved stone columns rose to a concave ceiling of natural stone. Below the balcony's balustrade stretched a long, narrow pool of dead-motionless water between abrupt vertical walls of rock, and, some two hundred feet away, through the arch of a natural cave, the starlit tropical sky showed like a little patch of freedom before our straining eyes. The haze which had thickened the air the previous night must have cleared away, for rays of the bright, full moon painted a "path to Spain" over the waters at the cavern's mouth, and sent sufficient light as far back as our balcony to enable us to distinguish an occasional tiny ripple on the glassy surface below us.

"Here, pretty, pretty!" our captor called, leaning forward between two columns. "Come up and see the brave white men who may come to play with you. Here, pretty pet; come up, come up!"

We stared into the purple waters like lost souls gazing on the hell prepared for them, but no motion agitated the depths.

"Sulky brute!" the half-caste exclaimed, and snatched a pistol from the girdle of one of his attendants. "Come up," he repeated harshly. "Damn you, come when I call!" He tossed the weapon into the pool below.

De Grandin and I uttered a gasp of horror in unison, and I felt his nails bite into my arm as his strong, slender fingers gripped me convulsively.

As though the pistol had been superheated and capable of setting the water in the cave boiling by its touch, the deep, blue-black pool beneath us suddenly woke to life. Ripples—living, groping ripples—appeared on the pool's smooth face and long, twisting arms, sinuous as snakes, thick as fire-hose, seemed waving just under the surface, flicking into the air now and again and displaying tentacles roughened with great, wart-like protuberances. Something like a monster bubble, transparent-gray like a jelly-fish, yet, oddly, spotted like an unclean reptile, almost as big around as the umbrellas used by teamsters on their wagons in summertime, and, like an umbrella, ribbed at regular intervals, rose from the darker water, and a pair of monstrous, hideous white eyes, large as dinner plates, with black pupils large as saucers, stared greedily, unwinkingly, at us.

"*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu!*" de Grandin breathed. "The sea-devil; the giant octopus!"

"Quite so," Goonong Besar agreed affably, "the giant octopus. What he grasps he holds forever, and he grasps all he can reach. A full-grown elephant thrown into that water would have no more chance of escape than a minnow—or, for unpleasant example, than you gentlemen would. Now, perhaps, you realize why Captain Van Thun and his first officer wished they had chosen to enter my —er—employ, albeit in a somewhat extraordinary capacity. I did not afford them a chance of viewing the alternative beforehand, as I have you, however. Now that you have had your chance, I am sure you will take the matter under serious advisement before you refuse.

"There is no hurry; you will be given all tonight and tomorrow to arrive at a decision. I shall expect your answer at dinner tomorrow. Good night, gentlemen, my boys will show you to your room. Good night, and —er—may I wish you pleasant dreams?"

With a mocking laugh he stepped quickly back into the shadows, we heard the sound we had come to recognize as the closing of one of the hidden stone doors, and found ourselves alone upon the balcony overlooking the den of the giant octopus.

"*Bon Dieu!*" de Grandin cried despairingly, "Trowbridge, my friend, they make a mistake, those people who insist the devil dwells in hell. *Parbleu!* What is that?"

The noise which startled him was the shuffling of bare brown feet. The tongueless youths who acted as our *valets de chambre* were coming reluctantly toward us down the passageway, their eyes rolling in fearful glances toward the balustrade beyond which the devil of the sea lurked in his watery lair.

"*Eh bien,*" the Frenchman shrugged, "it is the two devilkins again. Lead on, *mes enfants;* any place is better than this threshold of hell.

"And now," he announced as he dropped into one of the bedroom's wicker chairs and lighted a cigarette, "we are in what you Americans would call a tight fix, Friend Trowbridge. To accede to that half-caste hellion's proposition would be to dishonor ourselves forever—that is

unthinkable. But to be eaten up by that so infernal octopus, that, too, is unthinkable. *Morbleu*, had I known then what I know now I should have demanded one thousand pounds a day from those Messieurs Lloyd and then refused their offer. As your so splendid soldiers were wont to say during the war, we are, of a surety, S. O. L., my friend."

Beneath the bamboo bedstead across the room a slight rustling sounded. I looked apathetically toward the bed, indifferent to any fresh horror which might appear; but, wretched as I was, I was not prepared for the apparition which emerged.

Stripped of her gorgeous raiment of pineapple gauze, a *sarong* and jacket of the cheapest native cotton inadequately covering her glorious body, an ivory-wood button replacing her diamond nose-stud, her feet bare and no article of jewelry adorning her, Miriam, the dancer, crept forth and flung herself to her knees before de Grandin.

"Oh, *Monsieur*," she begged in a voice choked with tears, "have pity on me, I implore you. Be merciful to me, as you would have another in your place be pitiful to your sister, were she in mine."

"*Morbleu*, child, is it of me you ask pity?" de Grandin demanded. "How can I, who can not even choose my own death, show compassion to you?"

"Kill me," she answered fiercely. "Kill me now, while yet there is time. See, I have brought you this"—from the folds of her scanty *sarong* she drew a native *kris*, a wavy-bladed short sword with a razor edge and needle point.

"Stab me with it," she besought, "then, if you wish, use it on your friend and yourself; there is no other hope. Look about you, do not you see there is no way of dying in this prison room? Once on a time the mirror was of glass, but a captive white man broke it and almost succeeded in cutting his wrists with the pieces until he died. Since then Goonong Besar has had a metal mirror in this room."

"*Pardieu*, you are right, child!" de Grandin agreed as he glanced at the dressing table over which the metal mirror hung. "But why do you seek death? Are you, too, destined for the octopus?"

She shuddered. "Some day, perhaps, but while I retain my beauty there is small fear of that. Every day old Umera, the one-eyed she-devil, teaches me to dance, and when I do not please her (and she is very hard to please) she beats me with bamboo rods on the soles of my feet till I can scarcely bear to walk. And Goonong Besar makes me dance for him every night till I am ready to drop, and if I do not smile upon him as I dance, or if I grow weary too soon, so that my feet lag before he gives me permission to stop, he beats me.

"Every time a ship is caught in his trap he saves some of the officers and makes me dance before them, and I know they are to be fed to the fish-devil, yet I must smile upon them, or he will beat me till my feet bleed, and the old woman will beat me when he is weary of it.

"My father was French, *Monsieur*, though I, myself, was born in England of a Spanish mother. We lost all our money in the war, for my father kept a goldsmith's shop in Reims, and the *sale boche* stole everything he had. We came to the islands after the war, and my father made money as a trader. We were returning home on the Dutch ship *Van Damm* when Goonong Besar caught her in his trap.

"Me he kept to be taught to dance the dances of the islands and to be tortured—see, he has put a ring in my

nose, like a native woman's." She lifted a trembling hand to the wooden button which kept the hole pierced in her nose from growing together when she was not wearing her jeweled stud. "My father—oh, God of Israel!—he *fed to the devil-fish before my eyes* and told me he would serve me the same way if I proved not submissive to his will in all things.

"And so, *Monsieur,*" she ended simply, "I would that you cause me to die and be out of my unhappiness."

As the girl talked, de Grandin's face registered every emotion from amazement to horror and compassion. As she completed her narrative he looked thoughtful. "Wait, wait, my pretty one," he besought, as she would have forced the *kris* into his hand. "I must think. *Pardieu!* Jules de Grandin, you silly fool, you must think now as never before." He sank his face in his hands and bowed his chin nearly to his knees.

"Tell me, my little cabbage," he demanded suddenly, "do they let you out of this accurst house by daylight, *hein?*"

"Oh, yes," she responded. "I may go or come as I will when I am not practising my dances or being beaten. I may go anywhere on the island I wish, for no one, not even the cannibals who live on the shore, would dare lay his little finger on me for fear of the master. I belong to Goonong Besar, and he would feed anyone who touched his property to the great fish-devil."

"And why have you never sought to die by your own hand?" de Grandin asked suspiciously.

"Jews do not commit suicide," she answered proudly. "To die by another's hand is not forbidden—Jephthah's daughter so died—but to go from life with your hands reddened with your own blood is against the law of my fathers."

"Ah, yes, I understand," he agreed with a short nod. "You children of Jacob shame us so-called Christians in the way you keep your precepts, child. *Eh bien,* 'tis fortunate for all us you have a strong conscience, my beautiful.

"Attend me: In your walks about this never-enough-to-be-execrated island have you observed, near the spot where the masts which carry the false ship's lights stand, certain plants growing, plants with shining leaves and a fruit like the unripe apple which grows in France—a low bush with fruit of pale green?"

The girl wrinkled her white forehead thoughtfully, then nodded twice. "Yes," she replied, "I have seen such a plant."

"*Très bien,*" he nodded approvingly, "the way from this evil place seems to open before us, *mes amis.* At least, we have the sporting chance. Now listen, and listen well, my little half-orange, for upon your obedience rests our chance of freedom.

"Tomorrow, when you have a chance to leave this vestibule of hell, go you to the place where those fruits like apples grow and gather as many of them as you can carry in your *sarong.* Bring these fruits of the *Cocculus indicus* to the house and mash them to a pulp in some jar which you must procure. At the dinner hour, pour the contents of that jar into the water where dwells the devil-fish. Do not fail us, my little pigeon, for upon your faithful performance of your trust our lives, and yours, depend. *Pardieu!* If you do but carry out your orders we shall feed that Monsieur Octopus such a meal as he will have small belly for, *parbleu!*

"When you have poured all the crushed fruit into the water, secrete yourself in the shadows near by and wait till we come. You can swim? Good. When we do leap into the water, do you leap also, and together

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we shall swim to that boat I was about to borrow when we met this so excellent Monsieur Goonong-Besar-James - Abingdon - Richardson-Devil. *Cordieu*, I think that Jules de Grandin is not such a fool as I thought he was!

"Good night, fairest one, and may the God of your people, and the gentle Mary, too, guard you this night and all the nights of your life."

"Good evening, gentlemen," Goonong Besar greeted as we entered the dining room next evening; "have you decided upon our little proposition?"

"But certainly," de Grandin assured him. "If we must choose between a few minutes' conversation with the octopus and a lifetime, or even half an hour's, sight of your neither-black-nor-white face, we cast our vote for the fish. He, at least, does what he does from nature; he is no vile parody of his kind. Let us go to the fish-house *tout vite, Monsieur*. The sooner we get this business completed, the sooner we shall be rid of you!"

Goonong Besar's pale countenance went absolutely livid with fury. "You insignificant little fool," he cried, "I'll teach you to insult me! *Ha-room!*" he sent the call echoing through the marble-lined cave. "You'll not be so brave when you feel those tentacles strangling the life out of your puny body and that beak tearing your flesh off your bones before the water has a chance to drown you."

He poured a string of burning orders at his two guards, who seized their rifles and thrust them at us "Off, off to the grotto!" he shrieked, beside himself with rage. "Don't think you can escape the devil-fish by resisting my men. They won't shoot to kill; they'll only cripple you and drag you to the pool. Will you walk,

or shall we shoot you first and pull you there?"

"*Monsieur,*" de Grandin drew himself proudly erect, "a gentleman of France fears no death a Malay *bâtard* can offer. Lead on!"

Biting his pale lips till the blood ran to keep from screaming with fury, Goonong Besar signaled his guards, and we took up our way toward the sea monster's lair.

"*Le bon Dieu* grant *la belle juive* has done her work thoroughly," de Grandin whispered as we came out upon the balcony. "I like not this part of our little playlet, my friend. Should our plan have failed, *adieu.*" He gave my hand a hasty pressure.

"Who goes first?" Goonong Besar asked as we halted by the balustrade.

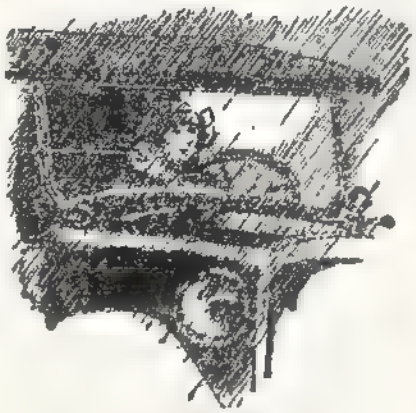
"*Pardieu,* you do!" de Grandin shouted, and before anyone was aware of his intention he dashed one of his small, hard fists squarely into the astonished half-caste's face, seized him about the waist and flung him bodily into the black, menacing water below.

"In, Friend Trowbridge!" he called, leaping upon the parapet. "Dive and swim—it is our only chance!"

I waited no second bidding, but jumped as far outward as possible, striking out vigorously toward the far end of the cave, striving to keep my head as near water-level as possible, yet draw an occasional breath.

Horror swam beside me. Each stroke I took I expected one of the monster's slimy tentacles to seize me and drag me under; but no great, gray bubble rose from the black depths, no questing arms reached toward me. For all we could observe to the contrary, the pool was as harmless as any of the thousands of rocky caves which dot the volcanic coast of Malaya.

Bullets whipped and tore the water around us, striking the rocky walls



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and singing off in vicious ricochets; but the light was poor, and the Malay marksmen emptied their pieces with no effect.

"*Triomphe!*" de Grandin announced, blowing the water from his mouth in a great, gusty sigh of relief as we gained the shingle outside the cave. "Miriam, my beautiful one, are you with us?"

"Yes," responded a voice from the darkness. "I did as you bade me, *Monsieur*, and the great fish-devil sank almost as soon as he thrust his snake-arms into the fruit as it floated on the water. But when I saw he was dead I did not dare wait; but swam out here to abide your coming."

"It is good," de Grandin commended. "One of those bullets might easily have hit you. They are execrable marksmen, those Malays, but accidents do occur.

"Now, *Monsieur,*" he addressed the limp bundle he towed behind him in the water, "I have a little business proposition to make to *you*. Will you accompany us, and be delivered to the Dutch or British to be hanged for the damned pirate you are, or will you fight me for your so miserable life here and now?"

"I can not fight you now," Goonong Besar answered, "you broke my arm with your cowardly ju-jutsu when you took advantage of me and attacked me without warning."

"Ah, so?" de Grandin replied, helping his captive to the beach. "That is unfortunate, for—*mordieu*, scoundrel, would you do so!"

The Eurasian had suddenly drawn a dagger from his coat and lunged viciously at de Grandin's breast.

With the agility of a cat the Frenchman evaded the thrust, seized his antagonist's wrist, and twisted the knife from his grasp. His foot shot out, he drove his fist savagely into Goonong's throat, and the half-caste sprawled helplessly on the sand.

"Attend *Mademoiselle!*" de Grandin called to me. "It is not well for her to see what I must do here."

There was the sound of a scuffle, then a horrible gargling noise, and the beating of hands and feet upon the sands.

"*Fini!*" de Grandin remarked nonchalantly, dipping his hands in the water and cleansing them of some dark stains.

"You——?" I began.

"*Mais certainement,*" he replied matter-of-factly. "I slit his throat. What would you have? He was a mad dog; why should he continue to live?"

Walking hurriedly along the beach, we came to the little power-boat moored in the inlet and set her going.

"Where to?" I asked as de Grandin swung the trim little craft around a rocky promontory.

"Do you forget, *cher* Trowbridge, that we have a score to settle with those cannibals?" he asked.

We settled it. Running the launch close inshore, de Grandin shouted defiance to the Papuans till they came tumbling out of their cone-shaped huts like angry bees from their hives.

"*Sa ha, messires,*" de Grandin called, "we give you food of another sort this night. Eat it, *sacré canaille;* eat it!" The Lewis machine-gun barked and sputtered, and a chorus of cries and groans rose from the beach.

"It is well," he announced as he resumed the wheel. "They eat no more white women, those ones. Indeed, did I still believe the teachings of my youth, I should say they were even now partaking of the devil's hospitality with their late master."

"But see here," I demanded as we chugged our way toward the open water, "what was it you told Miriam to put in the water where the octopus was, de Grandin?"

He chuckled. "Had you studied as

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Red Ether

(Continued from page 172)

He swung the transmitter slightly. A bit of potato on the dish vanished. There was no sound, no hissing, no sparks. The potato simply wasn't. On the opposite edge of the plate a bit of bread disappeared, and with it a part of the china. A chop-bone in the center of the dish was snuffed out, and a round hole marked where it had been. Thorsby tilted the transmitter slightly, and swung it slowly around. Then, as a schoolboy once would have wiped a drawing from his slate with a damp cloth, the plate and its remaining contents were wiped out of existence. A puff of dust floated in the still air a few seconds, settling slowly to the floor.

Blandon could find no words. Amazed beyond all telling, he stared. Thorsby threw out the switch. The transmitter ceased to glow. The inventor crossed the room to a radio set. There was the buzz and clangor of static as he twirled the dials. Then he struck the highways of the air:

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Thorsby switched off, and turned angrily. His eyes were ablaze.

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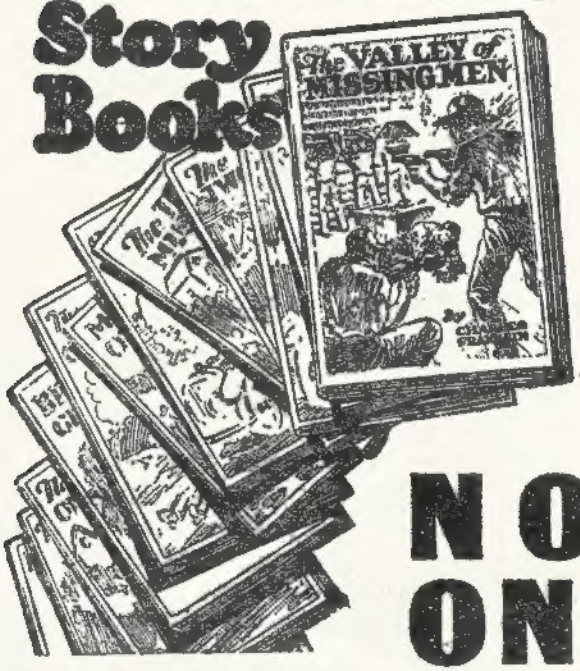

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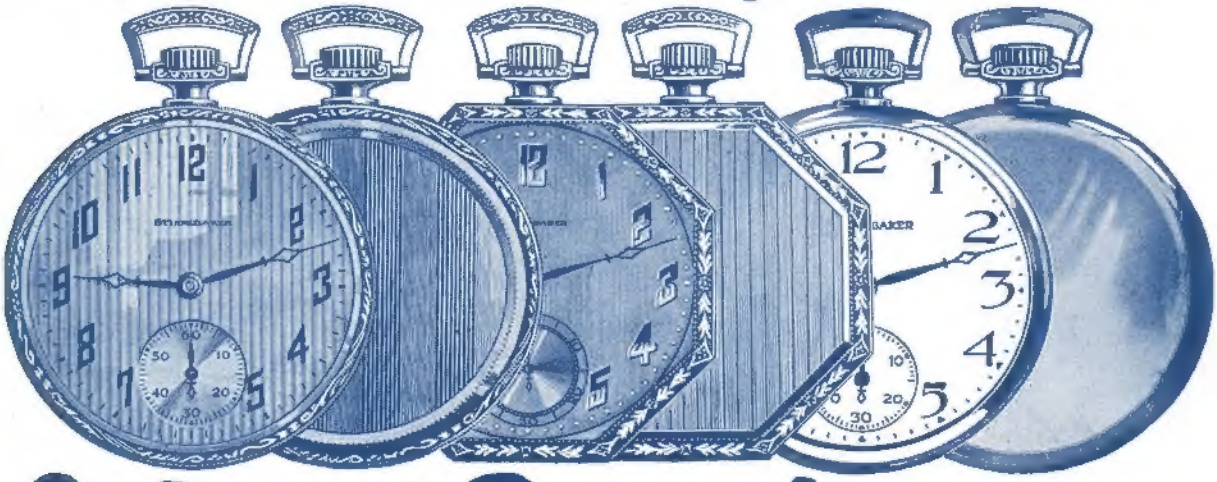

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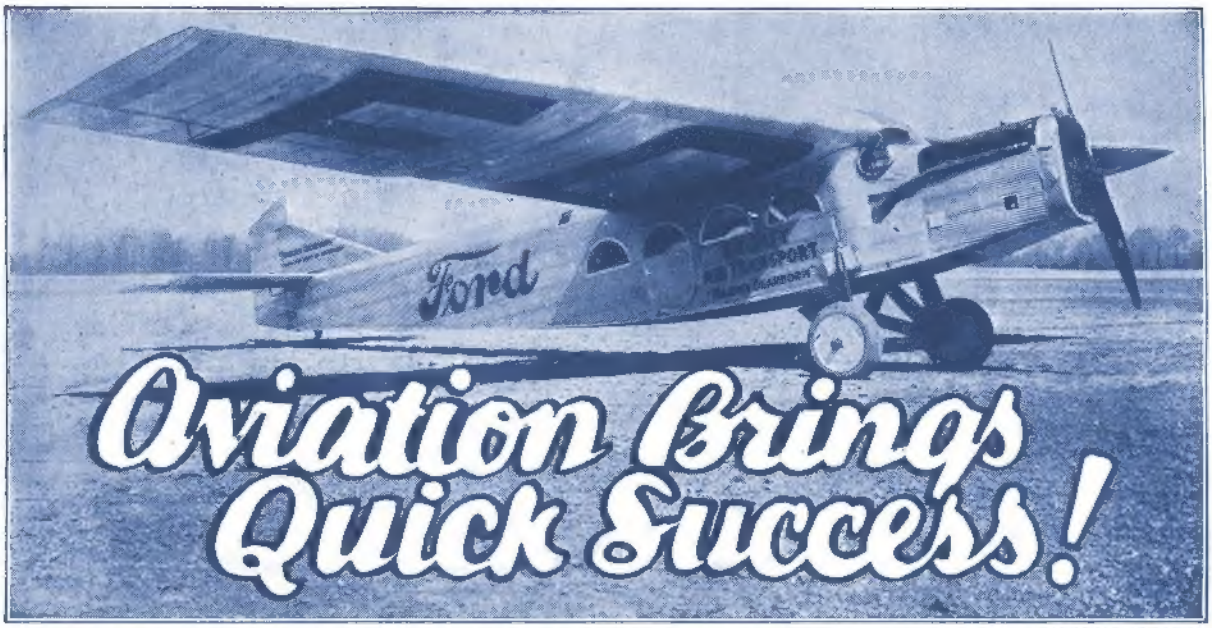

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